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What makes a fashion apparel brand cool?

An exploratory study on Gen-Z men

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Abstract

Introduction: Gen-Z are emerging as new consumers in the market, with more demands on brands than previous generations. Despite studies have showcased that brands can be perceived as cool by Gen-Z consumers, there is so far no research investigating what drives a brand to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z consumers. Furthermore, there is no research so far which has explored Gen-Z men in relation to fashion apparel consumption. This research hence seeks to gain a better understanding of Gen-Z men and their perception of cool fashion apparel brands.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore what factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z men, and how these factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z men.

Method: This study uses a qualitative methodology, consisting of 11 semi-structured interviews on Gen-Z men. An abductive thematic analysis complimented with a theoretical model was used to analyse the interviews, the theoretical model was adapted as a result of the findings.

Conclusions: The conclusions are that 7 different factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by the Gen-Z men in this study. It was found that the factors drive a fashion brand to be cool due to inheriting specific themes, in total 23 different themes were found across the 7 factors, hence the themes are how the seven factors drive a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool by the Gen-Z men in this study.

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1. Introduction

To be a brand in today's growing market is not an easy task. To grasp a consumer's attention is harder than ever. In research conducted by Carr in 2021, it was found that consumers are in contact with 6000 to 10 000 advertisements on a day-to-day basis. In 2007, this number was estimated to be 5000 advertisements per day, an amount that has nearly doubled since (Carr, 2021). At the same time Gen-Z, the hyper-connected and demanding generation, is emerging as new consumers, with less attention span than previous generations. Brands are found to play an important role for Gen-Z consumers, with emphasize on brands aligning with the values of Gen-Z consumers and communicating something about them (Robinson, 2021). It insinuates that a brand must offer a lot more than just a name, logo, or slogan for a product to capture the attention of Gen-Z consumers.

Brands tend to differentiate themselves from their competitors by adopting certain emotional appeals (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). A successful brand is one that can trigger associations in consumers' minds, associations which does not come from the functionality of the product/service, yet symbolic and emotional associations (Fill & Turnbull, 2019). It has been found that brands with many emotional attributes are more likely to be perceived as a choice in consumers consumption (East, Singh, Wright & Vanhuele, 2022). By adopting symbolic and emotional appeals, a brand signifies that there is more than just a product or service provided. The extra incentive is the emotional and symbolic value, which consumers have the possibility to relate to, either because it connects with their self-concept or because it reflects values they strive to attain (Fill & Turnbull, 2019). Individuals tend to make active decisions in their consumption, decisions which establishes a unique identity and signals who they are to others. For a brand to be seen as relevant in terms of self-expression by its consumers, it becomes crucial that the brand can portray positive associations which is not only valuable yet also recognizable by the consumers and their surroundings (Cătălina & Andreea, 2014).

In recent years, the symbolic and emotional appeal of being perceived as cool as a brand has received attention within marketing research. The notion of finding a brand cool is not a new phenomenon. Since 2001, the website *Coolbrands* has been listing the coolest brands within the UK (Coolbrands, n.d.). It has been found that brands which are perceived as cool by consumers are more likely to stand out in today's growing competitive market (Kerner & Pressman, 2007) since consumers find cool things socially desirable (Belk, Tian & Paavlova, 2010). The concept of cool has been looked at by several scholars (e.g., Warren, Batra, Loureiro

& Bagozzi, 2019; Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010; Gurrieri, 2009) to possibly identify what it is that makes a brand to be perceived as cool. Warren et al. (2019) for example found that a brand is more likely to be perceived as cool if it possesses certain attributes while Gurrieri (2009), on the other hand, found that a brand is perceived as cool if it is associated with cool people.

Despite the research has gone forward in terms of brands and its connection to coolness, less is known of how product categories and individual differences, such as age and gender, affect this (Warren et al., 2019). One of the product categories Gen-Z consumers spend most of their money on is clothing, especially fashion apparel (Leung, 2020), which is found to be commonly connected to the idea of coolness (Belk et al., 2010; Nancarrow, Nancarrow & Page, 2002). In 2020, YPulse conducted a survey on 100 000 individuals between the ages of 13-39 years, to investigate what fashion brands Gen-Z, and millennials, perceive as cool. The top five coolest fashion apparel brands according to Gen-Z are *Nike, Vans, Adidas, Jordan* and *Supreme* (YPulse, 2020). However, the survey is lacking information for what reasons Gen-Z finds these fashions brands to be cool. Fashion apparel brands hence lack information on why they are perceived as cool by Gen-Z consumers in the first place.

Furthermore, most of the research conducted on Gen-Z, in the context of branded fashion, has been focusing on both men and women. Some recent research has investigated the apparel consumption of Gen-Z women, like maternity wear (Weigle & McAndrews, 2022) and swimwear (Li & Leonas, 2022) yet no research has been done specifically on Gen-Z men in relation to fashion apparel consumption, hence there is a lack in theory regarding what Gen-Z men value in terms of apparel. Prior research has emphasized that there are differences regarding the perception of fashion brands between male and females (Ayman & Kaya, 2014). Hence, leading us to the problem.

1.1 The problem

Prior research has emphasized the idea to further investigate brands and perceived coolness within a specific product category/area of business (Warren et al., 2019; Jansson & Johansson, 2021) with social differences (Warren et al., 2019) to broaden the knowledge of what drives a brand to be perceived as cool and for what reasons. Since no prior research has investigated Gen-Z in relation to cool fashion apparel brands, this study seeks to gain insight on this.

Furthermore, prior research has also emphasized the usefulness of investigating the role of gender in terms of coolness (Rahman, 2013). Cool is argued to be genderless, yet past research

has argued that men tend to value coolness more than women (Nancarrow et al., 2002). There is scant research on Gen-Z women in relation to apparel consumption, yet no research has been found to investigate Gen-Z men and their consumption of apparel. This research hence seeks to further understand Gen-Z men's perception of coolness in the context of fashion apparel brands, to gain insights on their perception of what drives a fashion apparel brand to be cool. Hence, the purpose of the research is following:

1.1.2 The purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore what factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z men, and how these factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z men.

1.1.3 Research questions

1. *What factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool?*
2. *How do the factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool?*

1.2 Delimitations of the study

Cool is related to many different definitions (Warren & Campbell, 2014), a deeper understanding of the term will be provided by investigating its roots, how it has developed as well as its usage within marketing and branding. However, it is important to acknowledge that the term itself is not the intended aim for this study. This study will investigate how the term is used for fashion apparel brands in the context of Gen-Z men. Furthermore, this research will be delimited to Swedish males since the study is conducted under a limited amount of time with limited resources. The findings of the research will therefore be most valuable for fashion companies operating within Sweden.

1.3 Key terms

Gen-Z: Generation Z is individuals born between the years 1997-2012, meaning that the oldest individuals within this generation are reaching the age of 25 this year (Warren, 2022). This research will focus on generation Z men; therefore, individuals must be above the age of 18, yet not older than 25 (i.e., born between 1997-2004). Further in this research, generation Z will be defined as Gen-Z.

Fashion: Fashion is described as a style which is popular and accepted under a particular time-period, it hence refers to self-expressive items such as hair, apparel, and make-up (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.). In this research, fashion will be limited to apparel specifically.

2. Literature review

2.1 Fashion brands

Fashion brands are arguably a new phenomenon, at least in comparison to other product categories (Power & Hauge, 2008). Before the 18th century, fashion was either characterized as garments consumers made themselves with cloth, or garments they paid someone else to knit for them (Mitterfellner, 2020). Fashion apparel saw its growth in the 1960s, through the industrial revolution, as new production techniques was introduced, making it possible for firms to mass-produce larger batches of clothes more efficiently. The pressure to differentiate from competitors became apparent, as more clothing companies adopted the new production techniques. Hence, clothing firms started to label and brand themselves, taking reference from other product markets which had done similarly prior (e.g., food and household goods) (Power & Hauge, 2008).

It is argued that circumstances, occurring in the 1980s, changed and transformed the idea of fashion. The 80s became a time when several global fashion enterprises and luxury firms (e.g., Calvin Klein, Versace and Armani) started to actively use strategic brand management, to be able to withstand the changes in fashion and become brands consumers could place their trust in. Through these efforts, fashion brands altered the previous tradition of only focusing on apparel goods, extending their brands into other product categories (e.g., perfumes and interior textiles) by licensing them to manufactures within other product sectors, becoming more familiar and making the idea of fashion brands a greater part of consumers consciousness (Power & Hauge, 2008). The 1980s were also the time when the separation between what was argued to be either fashion or sportswear weakened, diminishing the previous idea of fashion apparel and ordinary apparel as two distinctive and different markets. The logos of apparel brands started to become part of clothing at the same time, hence having the brand logo visible on apparel products (Agins, 1999).

It is commonly accepted that fashion is important for people, since it enables consumer to express, and enact, a social role and an identity (Aspers, 2010). Consumers tend to “fall in love” with apparel brands which aid them to attain and maintain a social appearance they desire (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2022). This is however dependent on consumers awareness and knowledge about the brand, since consumers who carry more knowledge about a fashion brand are more likely to have a stronger emotional attachment towards it (Han & Choi, 2019). It is also

important that the fashion brand is perceived as authentic by its consumers, since it tends to increase emotional attachment to the brand as well (Choi, Ko, Kim, & Matilla, 2015).

2.2 Men and fashion apparel

The act of purchasing fashion apparel was, for a long time, argued to be a feminine activity. It stems from the characteristics that identified the male and female gender roles in history. Men were supposed to be the producer, provider, and protector whilst women were supposed to cater family needs at home, hence making women the consumers (Koksal, 2014). It is argued that certain circumstances occurring in the mid to late-1980s had a strong effect on men's view towards fashion. First, fashion magazines (e.g., GQ, Arena and FHM) began aiming directly towards men in hopes of increasing their self-consciousness (Edwards, 2020). By using pictures of apparel worn by male role models (e.g., celebrities, athletes) the intended purpose was to establish the idea of clothing as a symbol of displaying one's own masculinity through (Barry & Phillips, 2016). Second, the image of masculinity saw its growth through advertising, as companies used it as a strategy to sell products (Edwards, 2010). The advertisements promoted the idea of success through style and clothing by using men as icons, affecting men's perception of social value, making visual appearance a factor of it (Bakewell, Mitchell & Rothwell, 2006). Third, the rise of designer fashion for men through brands like Calvin Klein and Armani promoting menswear collections became popular during the 80's as well (Edwards, 2010). These circumstances drove the idea of a ´new man´ which value and care about his physical appearance, hence relying on apparel to showcase status (Rinallo, 2007).

Men now go further than purchasing apparel only for its functionality, purchasing fashion apparel due to it being aesthetically pleasing (Koksal, 2014). The need for uniqueness and social identity drives men when it comes to apparel (Seo & Lang, 2019), as they use apparel as a tool to represent their personality (Ayman & Kaya, 2014; Koksal, 2014). Men are found to be most influenced by social and cultural influences when it comes to apparel (Ayman & Kaya, 2014). Young men are specifically aware of fashion, they may not embrace fashion, yet their clothing style is influenced by what is argued to be fashionable (McNeill & McKay, 2016). McNeill and McKay (2016) also found that young men use apparel to strengthen the connection between themselves and their reference groups, meaning that young men's choice of fashion becomes representative for a certain reference group.

2.3 Gen-Z and fashion consumption

Gen-Z is argued to be different in terms of consumption compared to prior generations (Goldring & Azab, 2021). For example, they tend to be fussy in their consumption (Jiang, Yao, Cheng & Hou, 2021), careful about how they spend their money (Voguebusiness, 2021) and less loyal to brands (Jiang et al., 2021). Goldring and Azab (2021) argue that this is due to their early exposure to the idea of consumption which comes through digital technology. They point out that content online is to a large degree commercialised, therefore Gen-Z tend to have great brand knowledge and develop a preference for certain brands early on (Goldring & Azab, 2021).

Furthermore, Gen-Z is argued to be the generation most interested in shopping for clothes (Voguebusiness, 2021) and are more concerned about visible products, like apparel, than previous generations (Goldring & Azab, 2021). They tend to be concerned about price, quality, and the brand behind the fashion apparel they purchase (Workman & Cho, 2012)

Gen-Z purchase intentions towards branded fashion are driven by the need for uniqueness, self-enhancement, self-expression (Joshi & Garg, 2021; Sun, Wang, Cao, and Lee, 2022) and to gain respect from their peers, avoid social exclusion, standout and be different (Ceballos and Bejarano, 2018). Gen-Z find it important to portray a look which can be described as personal, fashionable, and expensive to highlight a stronger personal brand to others through apparel which is functional and of great quality (Goldring & Azab, 2021). It has been found that brands which enable Gen-Z to portray their individuality (i.e., uniqueness), they are willing to pay more for (Ismail, Nguyen, Chen, Melewar and Mohamad, 2021).

Gen-Z are mostly influenced by their friends in terms of fashion, yet opinion leaders and celebrity endorsements have an influence on their consumption as well (Gentina, Shrum, & Lowrey, 2016). Gen-Z appreciates fashion brands which are subtle in their marketing communication, meaning that they favour clothing brands which are more creative in their communication in comparison to brand which excessively advertise their clothing items (Djafarova & Tamar, 2021). For example, adverts posted by social media influencers are found to be more influential on Gen-Z in comparison to adverts posted by companies (i.e., brands) themselves (Munsch, 2021).

2.4 Gen-Z and Cool

Gen-Z tend to reject brands which they perceive as too expensive or too popular, unless they perceive the brand to be cool (Jiang et al., 2021). *Google* conducted research on Gen-Z in 2017, with the purpose of investigating what Gen-Z find cool and for what reasons. They found that Gen-Z perceive something to be cool if it is unique, impressive, interesting, amazing, and awesome. Gen-Z males are more influenced by trends and their peers in terms of what is cool, whilst Gen-Z females find something cool through how it makes them feel. They find musicians to be the coolest amongst celebrities, especially if the musicians are philanthropic and genuine. Shoes were found to be the clothing item most associated with the idea of cool in terms of fashion by Gen-Z, and the fashion brands which were argued to be the coolest were *Jordan, Converse,* and *Vans* (That Marketing Company, n.d.)

2.5 The history of Cool

Today's meaning and conceptualization of cool has its roots in African American culture and its associations with the musical genre Jazz, popularized in the 1950s (Belk et al., 2010). Through Jazz, the idea of cool in the 1950s was related to the notions of music, drugs, black clothing, dress code and dark sunglasses (Rahman, 2013) which stemmed from the musical artists performing the jazz music. Other than the external perceptions, the personas of the musical artist also signified a sense of concealed emotions, knowingness, detachment, and control, which also became associated with the idea of being cool (Moore, 2004). The idea of being perceived as cool was however used as a defence mechanism by the jazz musicians. They were met with a lot of prejudice during this time, hence the adoption of a specific dress code and a behaviour, which reflected "cool", was used by the musicians to detach from the difficult and uncertain working conditions (Nancarrow et al., 2002). The audience at these jazz performances were commonly characterized as black and white hipsters, seeking a rebellious expression of their individuality. The jazz musicians, which portrayed a fugitive image, became appealing to these audiences (Belk et al., 2010). Because of this, what was once used as a defensive mechanism by the black jazz musicians became the attitude of choice by the audience, which started emulating the portrayed style of cool as a result (Nancarrow et al., 2002).

It is argued that the beat-generation writers of the 1950s popularized the idea of being cool. The writers conveyed cool and the meanings it had adopted through jazz to the mainstream adolescent. This allowed the younger generations to portray coolness themselves, by exhibiting

traits like authenticity and by challenging conventions (Moore, 2004). Rahman (2013) points out that the artist group *The Beatles* and the artist *Bob Dylan* were considered cool icons during these times, since they were argued to be different from what was considered conventional. Cool had as a result started to be seen as a rebellious act, the younger generations used it as way of detaching themselves from the adult world and from what was seen as the norm in western societies. Hence, cool also started to become a part of mass culture.

Cool has also been identified through other sources, specifically through countercultural groups, often referred to as outsiders, which has been perceived as cool by that reason alone (Belk et al., 2010). It is argued that the real turning point of cool came in the 1960s through counterculture (Nancarrow et al., 2002). The time between 1960s and 70s became a specific period of counterculture due to the liberal movements within the USA (Bird & Tapp, 2008). This period was symbolised through the adoption of "hippie" fashion, which encouraged the mainstream society to accept being perceived as cool (Frank, 1997).

Hip-hop culture and rap music is perceived to be the latest exemplification of coolness, showing similar characteristics as it did in the 1950s through the jazz musicians: it is rebellious, it glamorizes the idea of being an outlaw and it initiate trends within fashion. Yet it also argued that rap modified cool (Belk et al., 2010). Connor (1995) points out that the image of being perceived as cool was demanded as an attitude in the 1980s. During the rap & hip-hop era, the increase in guns and violence became associated with idea of cool. Being perceived as cool was previously used as a method to avoid violence in the 1950s, in contrast to the 80s in which cool was used as an attitude to "prove" oneself, hence embracing violence and uncertainties as a result.

2.6 Cool and marketing

To be perceived as cool has been used as a tool by marketers to stand out from competitors and be perceived as different and unique (Kerner and Pressman, 2007). Hence, different techniques to acquire the perception of cool has been used. In the 1990s, it became common for companies to use coolhunters to acknowledge and interpret what consumers perceive as cool (Bird & Tapp, 2008). Coolhunters function as an intermediary between the cultural world and the business world, their purpose is to identify and discover trends which are perceived as cool by consumers (Gurrieri, 2009). The idea of coolhunting has however proven to be counterproductive. Since the purpose of coolhunting is to find what is trendy and cool, marketers capitalized on the

insights from the coolhunters and produced products based on cool trends and exposed it to the masses. By marketing the product to the masses, trends ended up seeming less cool, or even uncool, hence the products were seen as less relevant as a result (Belk et al., 2010).

Advertising techniques have also been used by companies to gain the image of cool, for example anti-advertising, which has been used by companies such as *Volkswagen* and *Sprite* (Frank, 1997). The intended purpose of anti-advertising is for a company to mock its own products and its brand in a fun and light-hearted way, in hopes of connecting with consumers by establishing a sense of knowingness regarding what is cool (Belk et al., 2010). Conventional market research (e.g., focus groups, ethnography) has also been used by marketers to identify cool trends, hence searched for what is cool directly from their consumers (Bird & Tapp, 2008).

Brands have also used icons and celebrities which are commonly perceived as cool by consumers to leverage themselves and their products, hence associating themselves with cool individuals to be perceived as cool by consumers as a result (Nancarrow et al., 2002). Dar-Nimrod, Ganesan and MacCann (2012) points out that an athlete is likely to be perceived as cool due to their competence in sports, similarly an eccentric artist may be perceived as cool by portraying rebellious traits. Warren, Pezzuti, Koley and Kirmani (2018) further emphasise this by giving the example of how the sportswear company *Nike* established an image of cool through endorsements by athletes (e.g., Michael Jordan).

2.7 The characteristics of cool

When consumers perceive a brand to be cool, it is often an indication for a general appreciation towards the brand (Belk et al., 2010). Consumers tend to have it quite easy to tell whether a brand is cool or not (Warren & Campbell, 2014), yet have a difficulty to point out what it is that makes a brand to be perceived as cool (Kerner and Pressman, 2007). There is not a specific, agreed upon definition for what being cool means (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Kerner & Pressman 2007). One definition which highlights the general idea of coolness, however, is constructed by Warren & Campbell (2014), defining coolness as "a subjective and dynamic, socially constructed positive trait attributed to cultural objects inferred to be appropriately autonomous". Through this definition, four elements of what coolness means can be extracted.

First, what is perceived as cool is subjective. This means that brands are perceived to be cool only if consumers perceive them as such (Warren et al., 2019; Rahman, 2013).What consumers define as cool is, to an extent, ground in the environment and the communities they belong to,

hence consumers opinions on what is argued to be cool is dependent on cultural, social, political, and sexual groups (Bruun, Raptis, Kjeldskov & Skov, 2016) as well as their background and interests (Warren & Campbell, 2014). It has also been found in a recent study that generational differences play a role in what is perceived as cool or not in the context of brands (Chen, Quadri-Felitti and Mattila, 2021).

The second element is that coolness is perceived as a positive quality. The idea of cool is typically associated with traits individuals tend to acknowledge as desirable (Warren & Campbell, 2014). For example, when Dar-Nimrod et al. (2012) surveyed people asking for traits they associate with cool people, words like "friendly" and "attractive" were among the most common adjectives used.

Third, coolness is argued to be autonomous (Warren & Campbell, 2014). This implies that to be cool insinuates that a person or an object (e.g., brand) is willing to go its own way, despite norms and conventions and, as a result, staying original and true to oneself (Bruun et al., 2016). Actions which make an object to conform or follow others (e.g., mimicry) shows a lack of autonomy whilst action which can be described as authentic and rebellious shows autonomy (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Belk et al. (2010) exemplifies this by referring to *Apple*, a brand commonly perceived as cool by consumers (Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010), which has a reputation as being an autonomous brand since it positioned itself as an underdog which went against the dominant corporations in its founding days (Belk et al., 2010). It is however a fine line regarding being autonomous, as an appropriate amount of autonomy is perceived as cool, hence harmful, or excessive amounts of autonomy have a negative effect on perceived coolness (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Similar ideas are mentioned by Nancarrow et al. (2002) who points out that "trying too hard" is the killer of cool. They further explain that fashion apparel, commonly perceived as cool, are hence typically characterized as understated and authentic (Nancarrow et al., 2002).

Fourth, coolness is dynamic (Warren & Campbell 2014). This refers to the idea that a brand may be perceived as cool by a consumer today, yet it does not mean it will be perceived as cool tomorrow. This has been found to be common for brands which goes from being perceived as niche cool to mass cool by consumers. Niche cool refers to the idea that a brand is perceived to be cool if it is associated with a subculture and are seen as rebellious, autonomous, desirable, and high status (Warren et al., 2019). Consumers adopt brands which are perceived as niche cool as a way of differentiating themselves from the public (Belk et al., 2010). Mass cool, on the other hand, is brands which was first perceived as niche cool but has through its adaptation

by the public lost its association with a subculture. As a result, the mass cool brand is considered less rebellious, original, authentic, and autonomous, yet becomes more familiar, can demand a higher price, and have a higher potential to become a competitive actor in the market (Warren et al., 2019).

2.8 The effects of being perceived as cool for a brand

To be perceived as cool is argued to be a feature all brands can make profit from (Southgate, 2003) for missions such as increasing market share (Gurrieri, 2009) and establish brand trust from consumers (Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010), since a cool brand is commonly perceived as more credible by its consumers (Loureiro and Lopes, 2012). It has been found that a brand which is perceived as cool is strongly correlated with love towards the brand (Tiwari, Chakraborty & Maity, 2021) and loyalty towards the brand, for both niche cool brands and mass cool brands (Jiménez-Barreto, Loureiro and Romero, 2022). Consumers tend to be willing to pay more for brands they perceive as cool (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2018; Jansson & Johansson, 2021; Lu, Liu, Tao & Ye, 2021) and being perceived as a cool brand has a positive effect on word of mouth, meaning that consumers tend to talk about brands they perceive as cool (Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010).

2.9 Cool clothing brands

In research on what cool means for teens and younger adolescent from the USA and Finland, it was found that most participants answered brand names when asked what cool meant in terms of clothing and fashion (Belk et al., 2010).

Fashion brands (i.e., Nike, Gap, Levi's, and The North Face) were amongst the first brands that used coolhunters, in order to gain the image of being perceived as cool by young consumers (Southgate, 2003; Donnell & Wardlow, 2000). The fashion brands *Nike* and *Stussy* were so anxious to be perceived as cool by teenagers that they gave individuals, which were perceived as cool (e.g., rap musicians), free clothing to gain this image. The fashion brand *Vans* knew that consumers perceived the brand to be cool due to its connection to skateboarding culture, hence the brand continued to leverage this connection through marketing communication efforts (i.e., endorsements by famous individuals within skateboarding communities) (Belk et al., 2010).

Fashion brands are found to be commonly associated with the notion of cool, meaning that when consumers are asked to name a brand which they perceive as cool – fashion brands are often mentioned (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro and Lopes, 2012). Loureiro et al. (2020) found in their study about luxury fashion brands and perceived brand coolness that luxury fashion brands, adopted by the masses, tend to be perceived as cool if they inherent the characteristics usefulness, high status, popularity and are associated with a subculture.

3. Theoretical framework

Prior research has found that consumers perceive a brand to be cool because it inherits certain attributes or is associated with something consumers place value upon (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). Research has also found that a brand is perceived as cool due to its products possessing favourable characteristics (Warren et al., 2019; Runyan, Noh and Mosier, 2014; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012) or because the brand is endorsed by a celebrity which is perceived as cool by consumers (Gurrieri, 2009; Belk et al., 2010; Warren et al., 2018). Therefore, a brand can be perceived as cool because of aspects which revolve around the brand specifically.

Previous research has also found that a brand tends to be perceived as cool if it connects more to the specific consumer, which perceives the brand to be cool, meaning that the brand is perceived as congruent with the consumer in question (Loureiro & Lopes, 2012; Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010). Hence, a brand can be perceived as cool because of aspects which revolve around the specific consumer (i.e., individual) in question.

Last, prior research has also found that an object (e.g., brand) can be perceived as cool because of its usage by individuals or/and groups of individuals which has influence on a consumer (Runyan et al., 2014, Bird & Tapp, 2008; Nancarrow et al., 2002; Donnell & Wardlow, 2000). Meaning, that a brand can be perceived as cool because of aspects which revolve around a consumer's social surroundings.

Therefore, through previous literature, three dimensions which drives a brand to be perceived as cool can be conceptualized, these are: *Brand aspects*, *individual aspects*, and *social aspects*.

3.1 Brand Aspects

3.1.2 Brand Associations

Brand associations is correlated with the information a consumer has about a brand, it can be conceptualized as the initial thoughts a consumer has about a brand if the consumers are asked about it or gets a cue about it (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2018). Brand associations will only exist if a *brand node* (e.g., name, logo, slogan) exist in a consumer's mind, the consumer thereby must be aware about the brand in the first place to establish associations (Dew & Kwon, 2010). When a consumer thinks about a brand, all associations he has about the brand will be part of his memory. Associations can hence be cognitive ones, built upon the features or benefits offered by the brand, yet also feelings of emotion about the brand (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2018). The associations act as a mental representation of the brand, which tends to be unique to the specific brand, making it different from other brands (Jeon & Baeck, 2016).

A brand with a lot of associations tends to be remembered more by consumers, it also tends to increase loyalty towards a brand (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Marketers actively try to link its brand with strong favourable associations, since it has been found that favourable brand associations can incline consumers to buy products/services from a brand as well as increasing the possibility that a consumer feels more fulfilled by the brand (Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013). Positive and favourable brand associations also tend to make consumer trust a brand, recommending the brand to others as a result. (Koll & Wallpach, 2014).

Warren et al. (2019) found that consumers perceive brands to be cool if they are associated with activities, specifically activities which are described as exciting, extreme, and daring. For example, they found that consumers perceive *Red Bull* and *GoPro* to be cool because the brands have associated themselves with extreme sports. They also found that consumers perceive a brand to be cool through its association with a certain subculture, for example Hip-hop, jazz or any group which is perceived as different from the mainstream. Consumers hence perceive a brand to be cool because it enables them to feel like they become a part of a specific subculture through the brand. They have also found that consumers perceive brands to be cool due to its associations with cultural values and beliefs, meaning that the brand becomes a symbol for what they cherish and place value upon (Warren et al., 2019). Hence, certain favourable brand associations tend to make a brand to be perceived as cool by its consumers.

3.1.3 Brand attributes

Previous research has found that consumers perceive a brand to be cool due to inheriting certain attributes (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). It is argued that a brand is built upon two types of attributes: Intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic attributes can be characterized as physical, hence referring to the functional features of a brand's products. These can be features such as product style and product performance. Extrinsic attributes, on the other hand, refer to features such as brand name, a brands marketing communication, package design, price, colours, symbols etc. which instead enables consumers to form meanings about a brand. The extrinsic attributes hence work as a differentiator for consumers, it enables them to distinguish one brand from another (Fill & Turnbull, 2019).

Brands which inherent certain attributes, more specifically extrinsic attributes, tend to be perceived as cool. For example, the attribute authenticity is often connected to brands which are perceived as cool (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012), yet to be perceived as an authentic brand can imply several things. Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn (2017) emphasize that brand authenticity is derived through two dimensions: indexical authenticity and iconic authenticity. Indexical authenticity is used to describe an object as "the original" or "the real thing", distinguishing it from its copies (Fritz et al., 2017). Iconic authenticity, on the other hand, can be described as something manifesting itself as indexically authentic, hence being like something. This requires that consumers have knowledge, expectations, or an idea of what authenticity shall be for them (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Through research, it has been found that consumers characterize an authentic brand to be continuous, meaning that the brand has survived trends and reflect a sense of timelessness. Authentic brands are also found to be credible, deliver what they promise, communicate deeply held values and act in ways which are perceived as ethical and correct (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin & Grohmann, 2015). Several attributes have been found to drive a brand to be perceived as cool, for example: being rebellious, having high-status (Warren et al., 2019), as well as being progressive, innovative (Gurrieri, 2009; Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010), unique and trendy (Loureiro & Lopes, 2012).

3.1.4 Product characteristics

It has been found that consumers perceive a brand to be cool through its products, more specifically through the characteristics of the products. Hence, if the products a brand produces possess certain characteristics, driving the product to be perceived as cool, the brand tends to be perceived as cool as well (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). Runyan et al. (2014) found that a product can be perceived as cool through hedonic or utilitarian characteristics. Hedonic cool is conceptualized through three dimensions: aesthetic, singular and personal.

Aesthetic cool refers to the aesthetics of the product, (e.g., style, colour), meaning that a consumer can perceive a product as cool due to the aesthetics of product (Runyan et al., 2014). Product aesthetics were found by Warren et al. (2019) to have an impact on the brand coolness, meaning that consumers perceive a brand to be cool due its products being aesthetically appealing (Warren et al., 2019).

Singular cool refers to the uniqueness and exclusivity of the product, meaning that consumers tend to perceive a product as cool due to it being unique and exclusive (Runyan et al., 2014).

Personal cool refers to the linkage between the product and a consumer's self-concept, meaning that a product can be perceived as cool if it is congruent with a consumer's self-concept (Runyan et al., 2014). Products which enable consumers to express their individuality, hence differentiating them from other consumers, are more likely to be perceived as cool, according to Sundar, Tamul and Wu (2014).

Utilitarian cool, on the other hand, is conceptualized through two dimensions: functional and quality. Functional cool refers to the functionality of the product, meaning that consumers can perceive a product as cool due to its practicality or comfortability (Runyan et al., 2014).

Quality cool refers to the quality of the product, meaning that a product can be perceived as cool due to it having great quality or/and longevity (Runyan et al., 2014). Warren et al. (2019) found that consumers perceive a brand to be cool through the functionality and the quality behind its products, meaning that brands which products were characterized as useful, high quality and helpful influences the brand to be perceived as cool (Warren et al., 2019). It has also been found that perceived usefulness has a positive effect on trust towards fashion brands (Harrigan, Feddema, Wang, Harrigan, & Diot, 2021)

3.1.5 Celebrity endorsement

Prior research has found that brands are perceived as cool if it is connected to individuals who are perceived as cool by consumers (Gurrieri, 2009; Rahman, 2013), which are commonly found to be celebrities (Warren et al., 2018; Belk et al., 2010). Through a research study by *Superbrands,* 11% of the participants argued that celebrities' opinions and/or usage of a brand has an influence on perceived coolness of the brand (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2018). For the apparel company *Nike,* for example, endorsement by the athlete Michael Jordan enabled the brand to be perceived as cool by consumers, since Michael Jordan is perceived as a cool individual, by consumers, in the first place (Warren et al., 2018).

McCracken (1989) define a celebrity endorser as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement". Celebrity endorsements enables a brand to associate themselves with the meanings consumers hold for a particular celebrity, hence adopting their traits as a result (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al., 2018). This occurs through the meaning-transfer model, according to McCracken (1989). He emphasizes that celebrities possess meanings with depth and power, derived from their personalities, lifestyles, and careers (e.g., actor, athletes). These meanings are transferred on to products and brands through endorsed marketing communication (e.g., advertisements) by the celebrity chosen for the endorsement. If the endorsement is successful, consumers shall be able to see the connection between the celebrity and the product/brand, hence that the meanings they associate with the celebrity will now also be associated with the product/brand (McCracken, 1989). Companies possess limited control when it comes to celebrity endorsements, since the persona of the celebrity is created in prior and, therefore, is not only linked to the brand/product which is being endorsed, yet many other things as well (Erdogan, 1999). For symbolic brands, like fashion apparel brands, it is crucial that the celebrity, which endorses the brand, is liked and can be identified with the consumers of the brand (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al., 2018).

Mitterfellner (2020) points out that celebrity endorsements have a great effect on brands due to four reasons. First, consumers want to mimic the choices and behaviour of celebrities they highly appreciate, meaning using the brands they promote. Second, consumers tend to perceive celebrities as trustworthy, meaning that a celebrity endorsement will indirectly increase trust towards the brand. Third, consumers tend to memorize brands which are endorsed by celebrities, meaning that they tend to be more aware about brands which are endorsed. Fourth, consumers tend to associate the positive qualities they have for celebrities with the brands they

endorse, meaning that the brands end up adopting these positive qualities through the endorsement. However, celebrities can also be associated with a negative perception from consumers, meaning that celebrity endorsements can backfire and have a damaging effect on a brand as well (Mitterfellner, 2020).

3.2 Individual Aspects

3.2.1 Brand-Self Congruity

Since the 1980s, the notion of cool has been linked to consumerism. Consumer nowadays try to acquire the perception of cool through selective consumption, meaning that they purchase products from cool brands to achieve the perception of cool themselves. Brands therefor act as tools for identity creation (Rahman, 2013).

Previous research has identified that a brand is more likely to be perceived as cool if it is congruent, or connected, with the personal values, mentality, and individual style of a consumer. In other words, the identity of the brand shall fit with the identity of a consumer to be perceived as cool (Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). This is further emphasized by Southgate (2003) who proposes that objects (e.g., brands) are perceived as cool if they enable an individual to express himself in a way which can be described as "authentic".

Brand-self congruity theory stems from psychology, the theory specifically proposes that consumers tend to place themselves in comparison to brands, to see if the brand in question matches their self-concept (e.g., actual self, ideal self, social self) (Sirgy, 2018). A brand which is perceived as cool by its consumers can be argued to be consistent with a consumer's self-concept, meaning that the brand act as a symbol for what the consumer seeks to be himself (Sriramachandramurthy & Hodis, 2010). Brands tend to connect to consumers if they can help them achieve certain goals, brands are therefore found to be used as a tool for goals such as enhancing consumers self-expression and social integration. Self-brand congruity is found to be stronger if the brand act as a symbol, hence its usage, by consumers, communicate something about the consumer (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). When a brand is associated with symbolic attributes, consumers purchase, and use, the products of the brand as a way of displaying their own identity through it (Hammerl, Dorner, Foscht and Brandstätter, 2016). Brand self-congruity can be described through three dimensions: Brand personality congruity, Brand User Imagery Congruity and Brand Usage Imagery Congruity (Liu, Mizerski & Soh, 2012).

Brand personality congruity refers to the connection between the personality a brand is perceived to have, an whether it is congruent with the personality a consumer perceive himself to have (Liu et al., 2012). The personality of the brand can be argued to be important for perceived coolness. In a study conducted by *Superbrands*, 72% of the respondents argued that the personality of the brand determines whether it is cool or not (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al., 2018).

Brand user imagery congruity on the other hand refers to the typical users of a brand, and whether the consumer perceive a similarity between himself and the typical users of a brand. This type of congruity is typically associated with social aspects like age, gender and culture, and is found common within product categories like clothing and jewellery (Liu et al., 2012).

Brand usage imagery congruity refers to the perception for the common usage of a brand, and whether it is perceived as appropriate for a certain situation by a consumer. The authors give the example of an expensive bag by the luxury fashion brand *Chanel* and points out that it may be perceived as appropriate to use in a formal situation by a consumer, but not for an everyday usage (Liu et al., 2012).

3.3 Social Aspects

3.3.1 Reference groups

Consumers are social beings; hence some brands, and products, are consumed with the purpose of attaining prestige and social inclusion (Hammerl et al., 2016). Studies have shown that social groups (i.e., reference groups) influence consumers consumption (Hammerl et al., 2016; Fernandes & Panda, 2019) by having an influence on their behaviour, values, and attitudes, ultimately affecting their self-concept. Reference groups, which affect and influence consumers in their choices amongst brands, can be friends, family, work colleagues and aspiring groups (Fernandes & Panda, 2019).

Runyan et al. (2014) points out that what is cool "is a set of common meanings inside a peer cohort, signifying group affiliation." Hence, the idea of what is perceived as cool is different depending on groups of individuals, as each social group has their own unique, and shared, idea of what is cool and what is not (Runyan et al., 2014; Donnell & Wardlow, 2000). What is argued to be cool by consumers is therefore not universal, yet micro-cultural (Belk et al, 2010). In research conducted by *Superbrands*, 44% of the respondents emphasized that friends' opinions

and/or usage of brands has an influence on whether a brand is perceived as cool or not (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al., 2018).

Research has found that consumers choices, behaviours, evaluations, and aspirations are influenced by social groups through three forms of influences*:* informational, utilitarian and value expressive (Park & Lessig, 1977).

Informational influence occurs when a consumer seeks information from a social group, meaning that the specific reference group is perceived to possess expertise on a specific matter (Fernandes & Panda, 2019).

Utilitarian influence occurs when a consumer seeks to conform to a reference group, meaning that a consumer's consumption choices is based on the premise that the individual aim to comply to certain expectations, or norms, for a certain reference group (Fernandes & Panda, 2019).

Value expressive influence occurs when a consumer seeks to enhance their self-image and self-concept, meaning that consumption choices is influenced by the values and beliefs of a certain reference group (Fernandes & Panda, 2019).

Publicly consumed products, such as fashion apparel, are found to be more influenced by reference groups than privately consumed products (Fernandes & Panda, 2019). Branded fashion is argued to be symbolic markers, since they communicate the identity of a social grouping and, as a result, differentiate one social group from another (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al., 2018).

3.3.2 Opinion leaders

Opinion leaders can be described as consumers which has an influence on other consumers, meaning that their opinion and behaviour influences other consumers attitudes and behaviours, usually through processes such as word of mouth (Moldovan, Muller, Richter & Yom-Tov, 2017). An opinion leader is argued to possess expertise within a specific product category (Fill & Turnbull, 2019) and have a great following from individuals, which perceive the opinion leader as authentic and highly relevant (Mitterfellner, 2020). Opinion leaders are also perceived to possess great taste, in relation to a specific consumption phenomenon, and are often argued to be role models (Casalo, Flavian & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2020).

Opinion leaders act as the intermediaries of cool, as they tend to shape and influence consumers opinion regarding what is cool and what is not (Nancarrow et al., 2002) through what Bird and Tapp (2008) describe as “advanced form of knowledge about products and consumption practices”.

The effect opinion leaders have on consumers can be explained through the two-step flow of communication model, first introduced in 1944. The model explains that information will at first reach opinion leaders through mass media, information which the opinion leaders then interpret and convey to a commonly large audience which they have influence on. This model is argued to still be relevant, due to opinion leadership being more prominent today through digital technology (e.g., blogs). It is argued that digital technology has strengthened the effect of opinion leadership, since the followers of the opinion leaders are able to strengthen the message, which is conveyed, by communicating it further to their peers (Mitterfellner, 2020). It has been found that opinion leadership on online platforms (e.g., Instagram) is more effective in its influence if its eWOM (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth) is perceived as original and unique. It is also found that opinion leaders on online platforms influence consumers perceived trust towards fashion brands, an effect which is found to be even greater if the personality and interests of the opinion leader is congruent with the consumer (Casalo et al., 2020).

3.4 The theoretical model

Through the theoretical framework a model can be conceptualized, visualized in Figure 1. It is however important to highlight that this model may not look the same at the end of this research, since this model is for cool brands and not for cool fashion apparel brands. The model hence acts as a reference point, with the possibility to be modified throughout the research.

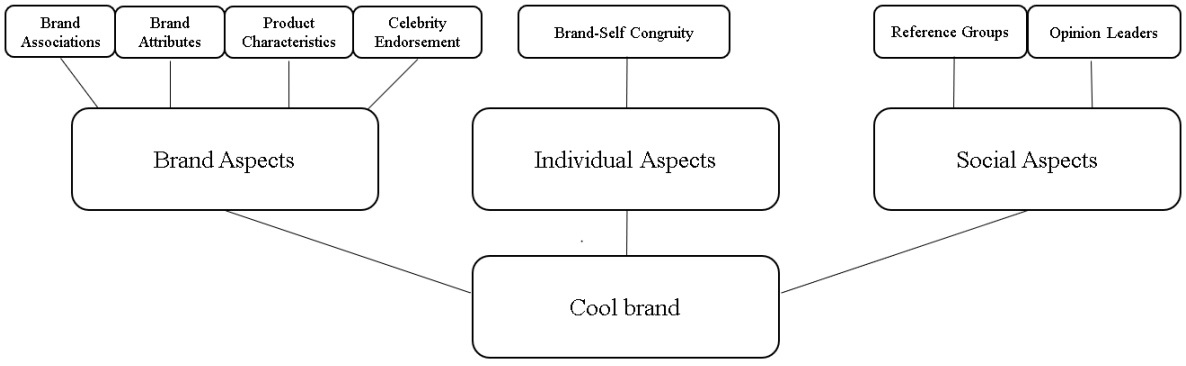

Figure 1: The theoretical model

4. Methodology

4.1 Philosophical paradigms in marketing research

Within marketing and consumer research, the two most common paradigms used by researchers are the positivist paradigm and the interpretivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm, stemming from empiricism, is centralized around the notion that the social and natural worlds conform to certain fixed laws. It argues that information about 'reality' is to be found through the most effective and objective means, seeking to find causality in the development of theory, which is to be consistent and unbiased. The positivist paradigm is commonly concerned with deduction, hence conclusions come from measurable and acknowledged 'facts' (Nunan, Birks & Malhotra, 2020). The positivist paradigm is typically associated with experiments and quantitative research (Ryan, 2018).

The interpretivist paradigm sees 'reality' as dynamic and evolving, meaning that there are many interpretations of what is argued to be 'real', seeking to understand multiple influences through individual cases (Nunan et al., 2020). It is centred around the notion that 'knowledge' is subjective, hence seeking understanding through people's experiences (Ryan, 2018). It uses pre-existing theory as a guide to understand where investigation is possible yet emphasizes the importance of not placing "too much" focus on existing ideas in development of new theory. Inductive approach is commonly used within the interpretivist paradigm, meaning that conclusions are reached, yet without 'complete evidence' (Nunan et al., 2020). It is commonly associated with qualitative epistemologies (Chung & Alagaratnam, 2001).

The purpose of this research is placed upon achieving an understanding of individual and personal experiences from Gen-Z men participants, with less focus on existing ideas, hence quantitative techniques will not be applicable in these circumstances. Therefore, an interpretive paradigm suits this research and its purpose the most.

4.2 Theory approach

Within research, one shall adopt a theory-building approach which is applicable for the purpose of the study. There are essentially three theory-building approaches which are common within the philosophy of science: deductive, inductive, and abductive (Eisend & Kuss, 2019).

The deductive approach is built upon the premise that one already has general principles (i.e., existing theories) which are ought to be tested on a particular case through hypotheses (Nunan et al., 2020). The deductive approach hence derives a conclusion on a specific case with the help of general statements (Eisend & Kuss, 2019).

The inductive approach can be argued to be the opposite of the deductive approach (Eisend & Kuss, 2019) since the inductive approach instead aims to formulate generalisations through patterns, trends, or regularities in observations, hence going directly from observations in order to create statements or theories (Eisend & Kuss, 2019; Nunan et al., 2020).

The abductive approach can be explained as a mixture between the deductive approach and the inductive approach. The abductive approach instead place focus on both empirical data and theoretical understanding (Thompson, 2022), meaning that one has existing theories yet believes that it is possible to build on to these theories by generating new theories within a specific phenomenon (Eisend & Kuss, 2019).

Since the notion of perceived coolness within brands is still unexplored in terms of fashion apparel brand, the deductive approach will not be a suitable approach for this research as it implies that the phenomenon has several, testable theories, which is not the case at the current state. It does however exist some previous theories regarding what drives a brand to be perceived as cool, hence an inductive approach is not suitable either, since one is already aware about factors which do play a role within the phenomenon in prior. Hence an abductive approach suits this research and its purpose the most. This means that prior theory (see chapter 3) will work as a base for the study yet will be modified and gain further depth throughout the study.

4.3 Research design

The research design establishes the foundation for a research project since it details the procedure to acquire information to solve research problems. Research designs are commonly classified as either exploratory or conclusive (Nunan et al., 2020). Exploratory research has the aim of gaining insights, ideas and clarifications about a specific phenomenon (Silver & Wrenn, 2013). It is commonly used within research when an issue or situation cannot be measured quantitatively, or that the qualities which are ought to be found cannot be represented through measurable processes. Conclusive research design is used when describing a phenomenon, hence testing specific hypotheses and investigate certain, pre-defined, relationships. Therefore,

conclusive design relies on information which is specified in clear manner. In comparison to exploratory research, conclusive research also tends to be more structured and obtain data from larger, representative, samples (Nunan et al., 2020).

When the research is exploratory in nature, meaning its aim is to gain an understanding about consumers views and behaviour on a specific phenomenon, a qualitative research method is commonly applied. Qualitative research is used to gain insights and an understanding on a phenomenon, typically through data obtained from a smaller representative sample. Quantitative research can be used in exploratory research, yet it implies that the phenomenon can be measured through analytical or statistical techniques. Qualitative research is commonly used to identify variables and hypotheses, which later can be tested through quantitative approaches (Nunan et al., 2020). Currently, there are no pre-existing information on Gen-Z in the context of cool fashion apparel brands, hence no variables or hypotheses are available to investigate this relationship quantitatively. Therefore, this research will apply a qualitative research approach, to identify the relevant variables in the context of Gen-Z men and their perception of cool fashion apparel brands.

5. Method

5.1 Sampling strategy

To implement a sampling strategy suitable for the research, one must first identify the target population. A target population is the population the researcher will obtain respondents from for the sample, hence a population which has certain inclusive and exclusive factors. A population can infer several things in relation to research, such as individuals, businesses, and households (Clow & James, 2013). The target population in this research will be Gen- Z male individuals, to be congruent with the purpose of the study.

When the purpose of a qualitative research is to obtain insights on a certain phenomenon, the research commonly uses non-probability sampling techniques (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2015). Non-probability sampling techniques relies on the researcher to choose participants after personal judgements, meaning that a sample is not chosen by chance (Nunan et al., 2020). To be congruent with the purpose, this research will use one non-probability sampling technique: judgemental sampling.

Judgemental sampling is a technique which relies on elements, chosen by the researcher, which must be represented by the participants in the sample (Nunan et al., 2020). Since this study has its purpose to explore Gen-Z men in the context of cool fashion apparel brands, the sample must consist of men born between 1997-2004 (i.e., men between the ages 18-25) who are able to perceive a fashion apparel brand as cool. It is important that the participants recruitment process takes in consideration the purpose of the research, yet also acknowledging the practical limitations (e.g., time, money, and capabilities) one is met with (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Since this research is conducted under time constraints with limited resources, the sample consist of individuals, which fit the requirements, within my near surroundings. The individuals for the sample were contacted either in person, through phone or through social media.

An important aspect in terms of the sampling strategy in qualitative research regards data saturation, meaning that the research must reach a point in which no new data, themes and/or codes are found (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For qualitative research, which uses interviews, Bernard (2012) argues that the interviews must be structured with questions that all participants in the study are asked to reach data saturation, since data saturation would otherwise not be confidently reached. The participants in this study were therefore asked the same questions, to confidently reach the point in which no new data were found.

In this research, data saturation was met after 9 interviews, yet 11 interviews were conducted in total to confidently reach the point in which no new data emerged. The total interview time in this research were 5 hours, 33 minutes, and 12 seconds. The specific interview time for every participant, amongst other specifications, is visualized in table 1.

Participant #:	**Age:**	**Cool fashion apparel brand:**	**Time:**	**Date:**
Participant 1	22	Diesel, Levi's, Mitchell & Ness	29m 22s	2022-04-03
Participant 2	19	Levi's, Tommy Hilfiger	39m 16s	2022-04-06
Participant 3	23	Calvin Klein, Hugo Boss, Gucci	23m 48s	2022-04-07
Participant 4	22	Carhartt, Patagonia, Vans	31m 18s	2022-04-10
Participant 5	25	Versace, Ralph Lauren	32m 31s	2022-04-13
Participant 6	22	Patagonia, Jordans	32m 8s	2022-04-13
Participant 7	21	Off-White, Acne	22m 47s	2022-04-14
Participant 8	20	Dior, Moncler, Palm Angels	37m 13s	2022-04-14
Participant 9	25	Les Deux, Levi's	29m 33s	2022-04-17
Participant 10	24	Off-White, Gucci, Ralph Lauren	30m 54s	2022-04-19
Participant 11	25	Hugo Boss, Tiger of Sweden	24m 17s	2022-04-22

Table 1: Participant, Age, Cool fashion apparel brands, interview time and interview date

5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Due to the subjective and dynamic nature of cool, meaning that one's perception and interpretation of cool may be different from another's (Warren & Campbell, 2014), in-depth interviews are the qualitative approach most suitable for this research. An in-depth interview is a semi-structured interview with open ended questions and inductive probing conducted on a single participant at a time (Guest et al., 2013). The purpose with an in-depth interview is to uncover a participant's attitudes and motivations regarding a certain phenomenon, therefor the researcher does not seek facts yet personal interpretations (Nunan et al., 2020). In-depth interviews enable a researcher to discover individuals understanding about a phenomenon and is a technique useful for obtaining answers from *how* and *why* questions (Guest et al., 2013).

There are both advantages and disadvantages with in-depth interviews. In comparison to another common qualitative technique, focus groups, there are certain factors which makes in-depth interviews a great choice for this research. To begin with, in-dept interviews enables one to discover deeper insights by concentrating on one individual at a time, which is not possible with focus groups (Nunan et al., 2020). Since coolness tends to be quite difficult to pinpoint, meaning that individuals tend to have it difficult to specify why something is cool (Kerner and Pressman, 2007), it is required to gain deep insights into participants beliefs to possibly identify what they value to perceive something as cool.

Furthermore, In-depth interviews have a greater tendency to obtain more honest answers, since focus-groups can impact participants to respond with answers which are socially expected, to conform to the other participants (Nunan et al., 2020). Since coolness is subjective (Warren et al., 2019), it is important that the participants, which is interviewed, can be open about their beliefs without feeling the need to conform to other participants beliefs about what is cool or not.

A major challenge with in-depth interviews concerns its lack of structure, meaning that the data obtained through the interviews can be hard to interpret and analyse. It is therefore important to acknowledge the possible factors in which the participants comprehend a phenomenon through (Nunan et al., 2020). It is crucial for the interviewer to be aware about possible factors participants may mention, a complete awareness about the theoretical factors which drive a brand to be perceived as cool is therefore important.

Another challenge is the potential influence the interviewer may have on the participants (Knox & Burkard, 2009). The interviewer therefore must be aware about being objective in the research to avoid obtaining manipulated answers from the participants.

5.3 The interview procedure

Prior to the interviews, the participants were asked to think about fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool (see 10.1 and 10.2). This step enables the participants to become more familiar with the phenomenon of cool in the context of fashion apparel brands, meaning that they have more time to think about what they characterize as cool. This step also enables the participants to become more comfortable with phenomenon prior to the interviews. The participants were advised to bring the name, or names, of fashion brands they perceive as cool to the interview, since the brands would act as primary subject of questioning in the interview, to alleviate the thinking process for specific questions.

To make the interview experience comfortable for the participants, the participants had the option to either participate in person or remotely, with video and audio. Interviews which are conducted remotely are argued to be a good approximation of a traditional face-to-face interview in person (Guest et al., 2013). It has been found that when interviews are conducted in an environment in which the participant feels comfortable, they tend to be more open, honest, and reflective upon questioning (Nunan et al., 2020).

The interviews began with general questioning about fashion and the participants perception of it. This part of the interview therefore involved questions such as how often they buy fashion apparel, where they buy fashion apparel and whether the brand has an importance in terms of their fashion consumption. This phase of the interview ended with questioning about fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool and whether they purchase apparel from these brands or not.

The second phase of the interview explored the participants perception on cool fashion apparel brands, hence questioning about aspects specifically related to the brand. The questions therefore explored the participants interpretation of a fashion apparel brand they perceive as cool, seeking their perception on the brand's image, its products and marketing communication.

The third phase of the interviews explored the social aspects of cool fashion apparel brands, hence asking the participants regarding the individuals which purchase, uses, or is associated with the fashion apparel brand they perceive as cool.

The fourth and last phase of the interviews explored the individual aspects of cool fashion apparel brands, hence asking the participants regarding the effect a cool fashion apparel brand has on them specifically.

5.4 Pre-test

Conducting a pre-test of the interview guide is an important step within a research project. Pretesting the interview guide enables the interviewer to identify possible questions or sub-questions which the participants may have a difficulty to either answer or understand. It also enables the researcher to become familiarized with the layout of the interview guide and to identify possible changes to enhance it (Guest et al., 2013).

After the pre-test, the arrange of questions and the wording of some questions changed. The idea was to first explore the importance of fashion apparel for the participant and later move onto individual aspects, yet this was found to be somewhat difficult. Hence the new arrangement became to first explore the importance of fashion and then instead move onto brand aspects, followed by social aspects, and have the questioning about the individual aspects towards the end of the interview (see chapter 10.3 and 10.4). The wording of some questions changed because they seemed confusing to the participant, for example the question "How do you feel when using the products of brand *X*". This question therefore changed to "When you wear the clothes by brand *X*, how do you feel?".

The pre-test was still deemed successful since the participant was still able to give insightful answers to the questions, hence its findings was used in the research as well.

5.5 Thematic analysis

Successful qualitative research relies on choosing a qualitative analysis which is applicable for the specific study in question, yet also an analysis which can create dependable results for the research (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). One of the most common analytical tools within qualitative research is thematic analysis and it is argued to be a great choice when one is new to qualitative analysis (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). Thematic analysis is a method

used on qualitative data with the intention to identify and interpret patterns of meaning within the data. The thematic analysis procedure is systematic in its nature, since the process begins by identifying codes within the data. The codes can be described as interesting elements found within the data, relevant for the purpose of the research (Clarke & Braun, 2017). After one has completed the coding process, the process of moving the codes into appropriate categories and themes is the upcoming phase. This means that similarities and differences amongst the codes will potentially lead to different categories and eventually major themes representing them (Lester et al., 2020). Lester et al. (2020) also points out that thematic analysis is a flexible analytical method, meaning that this type of analysis is an appropriate analytical tool across several research fields. Hence, this research uses thematic analysis to comprehend and structure the findings.

Since this study will apply an abductive approach, the thematic analysis is congruent with this approach. Thompson (2022) emphasizes that a thematic analysis with an abductive approach shall be guided yet not constricted to prior theory, hence themes which are created through the codes is not limited to prior theory. The importance is instead placed upon the active engagement between prior theory and data in the thematic analysis process (Thompson, 2022). Hence, the themes which emerged in this research is guided by the theoretical model, yet not limited to it, to build theory. Therefore, the theoretical model and its factors has changed and adapted throughout the research process because of the findings.

5.6 Primary data

Primary data (i.e., data which originates from the research) (Nunan et al., 2020) is gathered from the interviews in this research. Primary data hence consists of transcribed audio recordings from the interviews. Since the research were conducted on Swedish Gen-Z men, they were conducted in Swedish language. Therefore, the transcribing process was coupled with a carefully taken transcription process as well.

5.7 Secondary data

Another source of data which is also important for the research is secondary data (i.e., data which has been previously gathered) since it can establish a background and greater understanding of the problem which the primary data aims to explore further (Silver & Wrenn, 2013). Despite secondary data can be gathered from any source in any format, it is important that the data is argued reliable, credible and trustworthy to avoid any potential biases (Nunan

et al., 2020). The secondary data for this study has been gathered through the search engines Google scholar and Primo, with heavy emphasis on the sources that has been gathered to be peer-reviewed. The keywords which were used to gather secondary data relevant to the research were: *Coolness*, *Brand coolness, Fashion apparel brands*, *Gen-Z consumption, Men and fashion consumption* and relating factors. The secondary data are in this research a combination of several different sources, including research articles, doctoral papers, conference papers, books, book chapters and reports, to establish a thorough understanding on the current state of knowledge to avoid potential misinterpretation and bias of the current research field.

The secondary data was also needed to create the theoretical framework, since previous literature and research gave insights about previously known factors which drive a brand to be perceived as cool. Insights from secondary data hence enabled the creation of a theoretical model, which is a critical component in this research in terms of the gathering useful primary data.

5.8 Trustworthiness

To assure that the research is argued trustworthy, meaning that the findings of the study is reliable and of quality, it is argued that the findings and the method to obtain the findings shall fulfil four different criteria; credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Connelly, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). Hence, these criteria and how they are fulfilled, to establish trustworthiness to the research, will be explained further below.

5.8.1 Credibility

Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize that credibility is reached in qualitative research when the answers given by the participants are interpreted and represented correctly by the researchers in the study. To assure this has been reached in the study, further explaining, as well as reformulation, have been made upon questions which some participants have misunderstood, to correctly interpret and represent the answers into findings.

5.8.2 Dependability

Dependability relates to whether the findings of the data are logical, documented and stable over time, which is argued to be best confirmed through an auditing of the research process (Connelly, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). Due to time constraints and lack of resources, an auditing process was not possible, yet tables and figures which highlights critical steps to acquire the findings are part of the findings chapter.

5.8.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the process in which whether the findings are generalizable to other settings (Connelly, 2016) yet within qualitative studies this regards case to case transfer, meaning that the researchers shall provide enough information and details in their findings to make it possible to transfer (Nowell et al., 2017). This is showcased in the findings through the tables which visualizes the specific answers given by the participants, yet also by making sure all participants answer the same questions from the questionnaire (see 10.3 and 10.4) and fit the sample requirements for the research.

5.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether the findings from the research are obtained from the data solely, meaning that the researchers must showcase how conclusions and findings were derived from the data, to highlight one's objectivity in the research (Connelly, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). Tables which have been used to conclude the findings are part of the findings chapter, to highlight how the data has been used to obtain the findings. It is also argued that confirmability is reached when credibility, dependability and transferability is reached as well (Nowell et al., 2017), which has been achieved in this research.

5.9 Ethical considerations

Ethics has a major and important role in qualitative research, not only for the sake of the integrity of the participants, yet also for the specific research which is being conducted. Participants which are aware about the purpose of the research, as well as their rights to their participation, tend to give more insightful and honest answers to questions in qualitative studies (Nunan et al., 2020). The participants in this research have been granted confidentiality, meaning that their participation in the research is anonymous, except for their ages which is deemed as personal information yet a critical factor to this specific study. Their identities are hidden and replaced with the label 'participant' followed by a number, to structure the findings in a coherent and understandable way whilst keeping their identities hidden. The participants were informed of their privacy, anonymity and their rights regarding the research before the interview procedure (see chapter 10.1 and 10.2) yet were also informed additionally at the start of the interviews. The raw data obtained from the participant has then been terminated after the completion of the research. The data derived from the participants, as well as its processing and implementation into the research aligns with the European 2016/679 regulation (i.e., GDPR).

6. Findings

The purpose of this section is to showcase all the findings, relevant to the purpose, gathered from the participants in the study. The section will showcase the factors and themes found within them, starting with factors and themes found within brand aspects, followed by Individual aspects and social aspects. The themes found within the factors are characterized as second level codes.

6.2 Brand Aspects

6.2.1 Brand associations

Two themes, related to brand associations, could be identified through the answers given by the participants in the study: entertainment and subculture. In figure 2 and table 2, the initial codes which formed both themes are visualized.

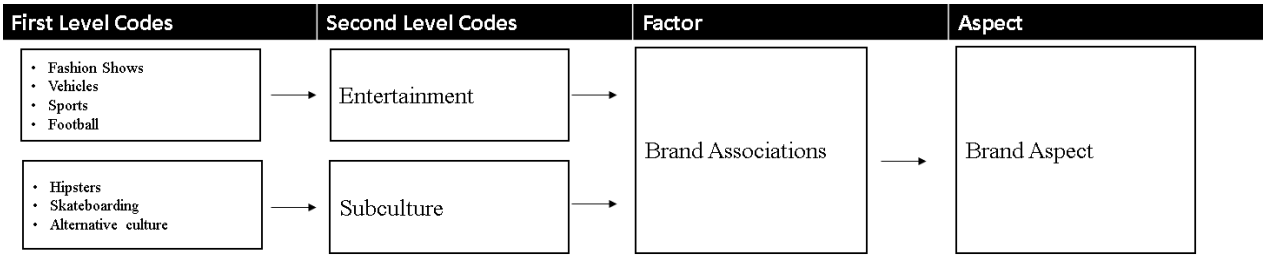

Figure 2: Themes within brand associations

Entertainment

Participant 1,6,8 and 10 highlighted that the fashion brands they perceive as cool is somehow associated to what can be themed as entertainment. Participant 1 associate the fashion brand Diesel with motorcycles and vehicles in general. The connection comes from participant 1 seeing pictures on social media in which individuals wear apparel from Diesel while riding a motorcycle or driving a car. Participant 6, who perceives Jordans as a cool fashion brand, highlights that the brand is the main sponsor for a football team. Hence, participant 6 associates Jordans with that football team. Participant 8 explains that Dior does not use advertisements directly yet host their own fashion runways which music artists attend to. Last, participant 10 explains that Off-white is worn by many athletes and is in general associated with the entertainment scene.

"[…] I do follow sports to a certain degree, and there are many athletes who wear Off-White outside the arena. I find Off-White to be strongly connected to the entertainment scene in general." - participant 10

Subculture

Another theme which was discovered in the context of brand associations was subculture. Participant 4 explained that the fashion brand he perceives as cool, Carhartt, is connected to alternative culture such as skateboarding and underground music. Participant 6 highlights that Patagonia is a fashion brand which is favoured by hipsters yet still has a contemporary fashion style. Participant 2 described that Levi's has an association with skateboarding, meaning that he can visualize a skateboarder, wearing Levi's apparel, hanging out with friends at a skatepark.

"[…] For example, a guy involved with skateboarding and that kind of culture I could easily see wearing Levi's. […] I can see a group of friends hanging out with each other, walking around at a skate park pretty much." - Participant 2

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Entertainment	
Fashion shows	"I don't even think Dior produce any advertising. They do have their own fashion show [...]. You see a bunch of rappers attending their fashion show, dressed in Dior, and posing while there […]." – Participant 8
Vehicles	"[…] On the other hand, I connect diesel to motorcycles. I have often seen on instagram that people wear their clothes while sitting on a motorcycle or in a nice car for example.. which I think is cool. […]" - Participant 1
Sports	"[…] I do follow sports to a certain degree, and there are many athletes who wear Off-White outside the arena. I find Off-White to be strongly connected to the entertainment scene in general." - participant 10
Football	"[…] Above all, it is sports. Jordans is the main sponsor for Paris Saint-Germain, so the logo is visible on all the football shirts worn by the teammates in Paris Saint-Germain. […]." – Participant 6
Subculture	
Hipsters	[…] it's a relatively new clothing brand, sort of a brand for hipsters, which has a bit more of a contemporary fashion style to it. - Participant 6
Skateboarding	"[…] For example a guy involved with skateboarding and that kind of culture I could easily see wearing levi's. […] I can see a group of friends hanging out with each other, walking around at a skate park pretty much." - Participant 2
Alternative culture	"[…] I would say alternative culture. It does not have to be skateboarding specifically, but sort of that alternative culture. You would see someone wear a Carhartt Jacket at a Yung Lean concert for example. […]." – Participant 4

Table 2: Themes within brand associations

6.2.2 Brand attributes

Like brand associations, themes in relation to brand attributes could also be identified. These themes, characterized as second level codes, is visualized in figure 3. Four themes related to brand attributes could be identified: authentic, valuable, uncommon, and unique.

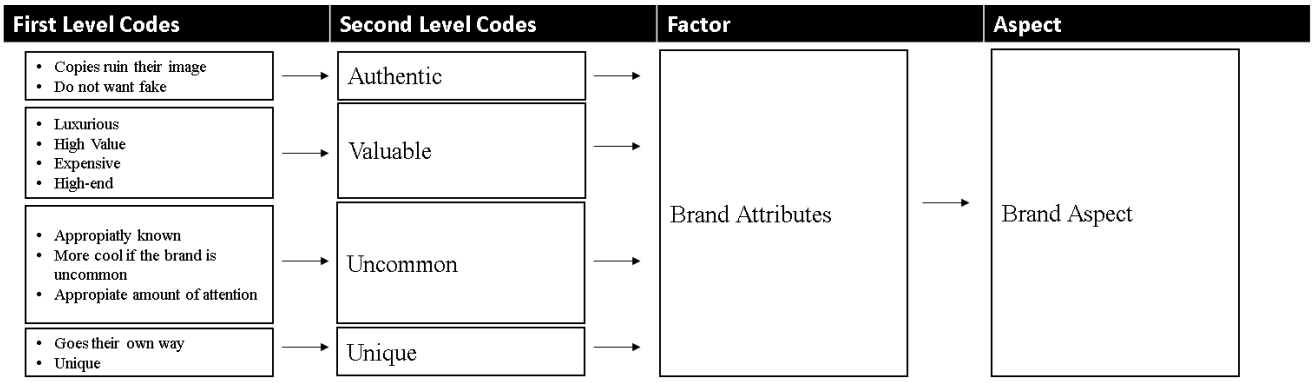

Figure 3: Themes within brand attributes

Authentic

Two participants, 3 and 8, described the importance of authenticity regarding the brands they perceive as cool. Participant 3 pointed out there is difference between wearing clothes from Gucci itself in comparison to brands which perpetuate themselves as Gucci, meaning that he does not find the perpetuators cool, since they are fake. Participant 8 argued that perpetuators also ruin the image of the brand, emphasizing that there is a prestige one wants to attain by wearing the brand Dior as well.

"[…] and the copies ruin the image of them. The more copies there are, the less you will want to buy because you want to convey that you are rich. If there are copies and no one thinks your Dior garment is genuine, you have failed to convey this message to your surroundings. […]" – Participant 8

Valuable

Participants 5, 7, 8 and 11 argued that the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool were in some way valuable. Participant 7 explained that he perceives the brand Off-White as cool, yet points out that their clothes are quite expensive, at least in comparison to what he typically pays for apparel. Participant 11, who perceives the brand Hugo Boss as cool, emphasized that Hugo Boss has acquired a luxurious image through the usage of celebrities in various advertisements.

“[…] usually, it is some great looking celebrity who wears a nice suit from Hugo Boss and sort of shows off their perfume. It sorts of shows that the brand is more luxurious.” – Participant 11

Uncommon

Participants 1, 8 and 9 emphasized that a fashion apparel brand shall be considered uncommon to be perceived as cool. Participant 8 explained that he perceives a fashion brand as cool if it is known and used by an appropriate amount of people, emphasizing that there shall be a balance regarding how known the brand is by the public. On a similar note, participant 1 points out that a fashion brand is cooler if it is less common amongst consumers.

"[…] if many have the clothing brand it becomes so common that you do not notice it, but it is still cool. But it's cooler if you have clothes from a clothing brand that is unusual, because people will notice the brand more." - Participant 1

Unique

Participant 2 and 7 emphasized that they found the fashion brands they perceive as cool to be unique. Participant 2 argued that Levi’s is different from other fashion brands, whilst participant 7 see Off-White as a cool fashion brand which dare to go their own way and becoming a brand which others (i.e., brands) take inspiration from.

"They dare to go their own way. You can see that many cheaper brands are trying to mimic them a bit. Then you see that they are frontrunners in the market. […]" - Participant 7

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Authentic	
Copies ruin the image	"[…] and the copies ruin the image of them. The more copies there are, the less you will want to buy because you want to convey that you are rich. If there are copies and no one thinks your Dior garment is genuine, you have failed to convey this message to your surroundings. […]." – Participant 8
Do not want fake	"[…]There is however a difference if you have Gucci or fake Gucci. You do not want something that is fake. […]." – Participant 3
Valuable	
Luxurious	"[…] usually, it is some great looking celebrity who wears a nice suit from Hugo Boss and sort of shows off their perfume. It sorts of shows that the brand is more luxurious." – Participant 11
High value	[…] Value plays a pretty big role in what is considered cool or not. I have a pair of Jordans because their value in retrospect is quite high and so on. They are considered cool that way. […]." – Participant 8
Expensive	"[…] They are quite expensive, at least if you compare it with what I usually buy or what a regular sweater cost. You will have to add a few thousands to the price."- Participant 7
High-end	"But Versace belongs a little more maybe to the high-end market and is sort of a Hypebeast brand like Louis Vuitton and Gucci. They all have their different styles and differ a lot from each other, but then they are also much more expensive." – Participant 5
Uncommon	
Appropiatly known	"[...] For a brand to be cool, it is important that not too many people use it but at the same time not too little .. there should be a balance there. Because if there are too many, it will be quite common and it will not be considered cool, as with Parajumpers for example. But if there are only a few individuals who use it, then maybe people do not notice that it is an expensive brand and so on, so there must be a balance so that people have seen it before or that some know about it. [...]" - Participant 8
More cool if the brand is uncommon	"[…] if many have the clothing brand it becomes so common that you do not notice it, but it is still cool. But it's cooler if you have clothes from a clothing brand that is unusual, because people will notice the brand more." - Participant 1
Appropiate amount of attention	"Things that do not directly attract too much attention, I feel. […] cool is when something attracts just enough attention, a little more lowkey sort of." - Participant 9
Unique	
Goes their own way	"They dare to go their own way. You can see that many cheaper brands are trying to mimic them a bit. Then you see that they are frontrunners in the market. […]" - Participant 7
Unique	"[…] Levi's, I think that is cool. I find them being a little different from many other clothing brands. A little more unique. […] ."– Participant 2

Table 3: Themes in brand attributes

6.2.3 Product Characteristics

When asking the participants how they would describe the products of the brand/brands they perceive as cool, several themes could be identified. The themes that were found is visualized in figure 4 and will be explained further below.

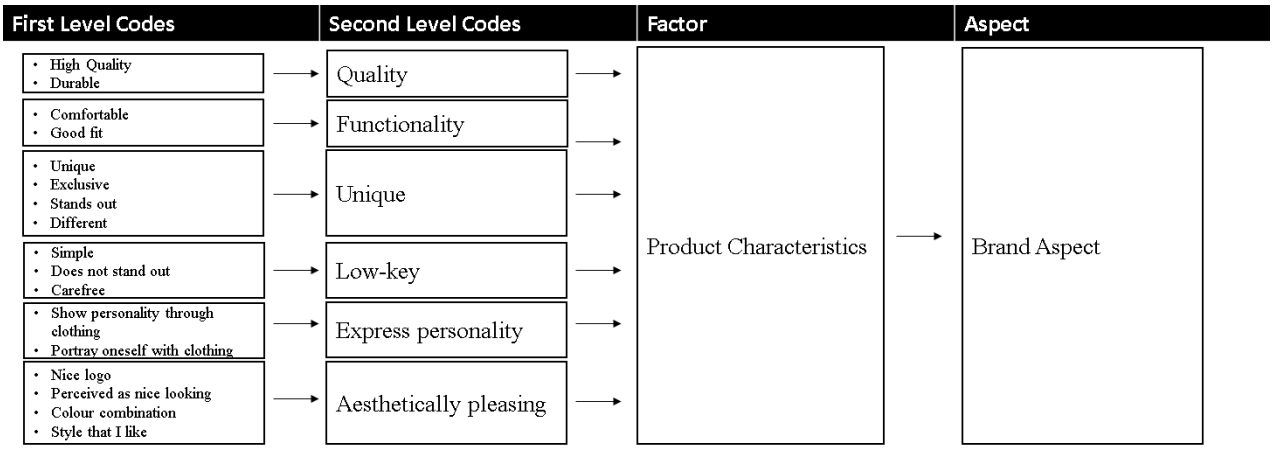

Figure 4: Themes within product characteristics

Quality

Almost every participant in the study emphasized that the fashion brand, which they perceive as cool, were of high quality in terms of their apparel. Participant 5 explained that despite never have bought a garment from Versace, he believes the brand do have high quality in their apparel. Participant 4, which finds Carhartt to be a cool fashion brand, explained that Carhartt started out as a brand for craftsmen and later became associated with skateboarding.

"I would say that they are durable. If I am not mistaken, it is originally a brand for craftsmen. […] which later began to be used by skaters and became more of a skateboard apparel brand." – Participant 4

Functionality

Like quality, the functionality of the brands apparel was also highlighted by the participants. Participant 11 pointed out that Hugo Boss always have a great fit in their apparel, better than many other fashion brands. Participant 9 perceive Lex Deus as a cool fashion brand and find their clothes to be comfortable since they are typically more loose fitted.

"Les Deux makes very comfortable clothes, clothes that are a little wider. For example, their hoodies, they are not as tight as some other models of other clothing brands. So, their clothes are very good in that sense, they are loose in its fit. […]" – Participant 9

Unique

Uniqueness was not only found as a theme within brand attributes, yet also as a theme in the context of the perceived cool fashion brands apparel. Participant 5 highlights that the apparel design of Versace is very extravagant and as a result stands out very much in comparison to other brands apparel, making their products unique in that way. Participant 10, who found Off-White and Gucci to be cool fashion brands, explains that both brands are innovative in their design in their own ways.

"[...] But I think both do a good job and have a more innovative design and they dare a little more. It's not just a hoodie or just a pair of pants, but it's more...that they go a little out of bounds of what you usually see in clothing designs. [...]" - Participant 10

Low-key

Another theme which emerged, in terms of product characteristics, was the theme low-key. Participant 1, 3, 4 and 11 emphasized in some way that the apparel, from the brands they perceive as cool, shall not stand out yet rather be more low-key in its design and appearance. Participant 3 finds Calvin Klein to be a cool fashion brand and highlights that he purchases clothing from them since their clothing design is typically simple and neutral. Participant 4 highlighted that Patagonia and Vans are cool fashion brands and perceive them as more carefree in terms of design.

"[…] A little carefree perhaps. I guess that is what it comes down to, that it's a bit carefree. For example, if I wear a Tiger of Sweden coat or pair of Loake shoes. It is very neat, very dressed up, handsome and nice, but it is not carefree. […] While with Patagonia or maybe Vans, it's more of a cool style, because it sort of feels carefree." – Participant 4

Express personality

Two participants, participant 6 and 10, valued that they were able to express their own personality through the apparel from the fashion brands they perceive as cool. Participant 6 highlighted that his choices in terms of clothing is a mixture of feeling nicely dressed and cool, which is a reason why he purchases clothing from the brand East&West, which he finds cool. Participant 10, who finds Ralph Lauren to be a cool fashion brand, explains that he can express himself better in Ralph Lauren's clothing.

"Yes, you could say that because I think Ralph Lauren fits in well with my style. So, I express more of myself with their garment and have more freedom to dress as I want. So, then I feel more cool in the way that. […] I'm not trying to be someone I'm not. So, I'm not trying to

portray another image of myself. But I try to portray myself as much as I can. Kind of show that this is me, so that is the picture I'm trying to portray sort of. [...]" - Participant 10

Aesthetically pleasing

Aesthetically pleasing was another theme which were found through the answers that was given by participant 4, 6, 8 and 11. Participant 4 highlighted that Carhartt brand logo contributed to making their clothes cooler, while participant 11 explained that Gucci represents a type of clothing style that he prefers. Participant 8 mentioned that Dior typically has a colour combination on their apparel which goes in hand with their brand logo, which he finds aesthetically pleasing.

"[...]Dior has this a little more beige and as black text on Dior, and I think it is quite nice, they have a good colour combination on the logo which means that their clothes are based on those colours for the most part ... Which makes it quite nice." - Participant 8

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Quality	
High quality	"I have never bought Versace myself. I do get the feeling that it is high quality though, but not suitable for Swedish weather." – Participant 5
Durable	"I would say that they are durable. If I am not mistaken, it is originally a brand for craftsmen. […] which later began to be used by skaters and became more of a skateboard apparel brand." – Participant 4
Functionality	
Good fit	"They have a much better fit than many other brands. I have bought suits and similar clothes from different brands. I always find that Hugo Boss has a very, very good fit. They always fit very well." – Participant 11
Comfortable	"Les Deux makes very comfortable clothes, clothes that are a little wider. For example, their hoodies, they are not as tight as some other models of other clothing brands. So, their clothes are very good in that sense, they are loose in its fit. […]." – Participant 9
Unique	
Innovative design	"[...] But I think both of them do a good job and have a more innovative design and they dare a little more. It's not just a hoodie or just a pair of pants, but it's more..that they go a little out of bounds of what you usually see in clothing designs. [...]" - Participant 10
Own design	"[...] Off-Whtie, for example, has very special clothes that absolutely no one else has when it comes to design. And it's cool, I believe, that they dare to go their own way and surprise with their own design. Then I may not like the garments that much personally, but I can still see them as cool when someone wears them." - Participant 7
Stands out	"[…]Versace is the first thing that comes to mind. Their clothes are very extravagant, very expensive. Stands out very much." – Participant 5

Low-key	
Simple	“[…] I think it's cooler when clothes are simpler in its design. […] I have a lot of basic clothes. I tend to stick to black, grey, white in terms of colour. That's why I buy from Calvin Klein, because they typically have more of a simple design on their clothing.” – Participant 3
Does not stand out	[…] Not really, Diesel typically produces plain standard hoodies or t-shirts. There is nothing that stand outs. […] I like it when it is neutral in its design since you do not want to stand out too much. […] – Participant 1
Non-Visible logo	"[…] Because I buy their clothes that do not have any large logos on them, it may be as neutral as possible or have no visible logo at all. […]" - Participant 11
Carefree	“[…] A little carefree perhaps. I guess that is what it comes down to, that it's a bit carefree. For example, if I wear a Tiger of Sweden coat or pair of Loake shoes. It is very neat, very dressed up, handsome and nice, but it is not carefree. […] While with Patagonia or maybe Vans, it's more of a cool style, because it sort of feels carefree.” – Participant 4
Express personality	
Show personality through clothing	"[…] My clothing style is in a way an image of how I want to show my personality, and it has become more of a mixture of maybe cool and nicely dressed.. and then East & West suits me as a clothing brand." - Participant 6
Portray oneself with the clothing	"Yes, you could say that because I think it fits in well with my style. So I express more of myself with that garment and have more freedom to dress as I want. So then I feel more cool in the way that. […] I'm not trying to be someone I'm not. So I'm not trying to portray another image of myself. But I try to portray myself as much as I can. Kind of show that this is me, so that is the picture I'm trying to portray sort of. [...]" - Participant 10
Aesthetically pleasing	
Nice logo	[…] but, I think the logo is quite nice. I think it is a cheeky logo and it definitely contributes to the clothes of Carhartt being seen as cool. - Participant 4
Percieved as nice looking	[…] you know what a pair of Jordans or Patagonia is and it is well accepted that .. if you have clothes from Jordans and Patagonia it is seen as nice-looking and cool. - Participant 6
Colour combination	"[...]Dior has this a little more beige and as black text on Dior and I think it is quite nice, they have a good color combination on the logo which means that their clothes are based on those colors for the most part .. Which makes it quite nice." - Participant 8
Style that I like	"[…] More because I know they represent quality and style that I like. When it comes to the fashion I like, they are the best brands you can buy. […]" - Participant 11

Table 4: Themes within product characteristics

6.2.4 Marketing Communication

Through the study, it was discovered that celebrity endorsement was not the only factor, in terms of marketing communication, which the participants mentioned in the context of cool fashion brands. Hence, celebrity endorsement as a factor transitioned into marketing communication due to the findings. This is visualized in figure 5.

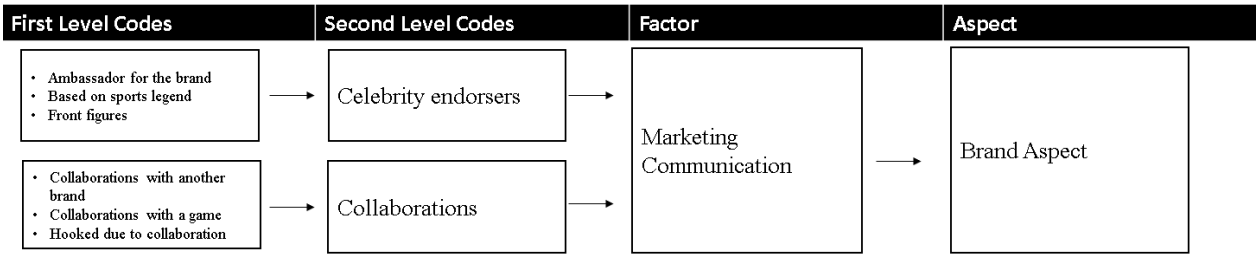

Figure 5: Themes within marketing communication

Celebrity endorsers

Participant 5, 6 and 7 mentioned that the fashion brands they perceive as cool uses celebrity endorsers, yet in different ways. Participant 5 explained that he associates the music artist Bruno Mars with Versace, because the artist commonly wears Versace apparel and has songs in which Versace is mentioned in the lyrics. Participant 6, who perceives Jordan as a cool fashion brand, has acknowledged that the brand itself stems from a sports figure, Michael Jordan, which he associates with the brand as a result. Lastly, participant 7 highlights that Off-White and Supreme make use of front-figures and celebrities to make a name for themselves.

"Above all, it is probably price, they are often more expensive due to perhaps front figures and that they are limited in stock […] Off-White and Supreme for example, push it out on celebrities and try to make a name for themselves that way" - Participant 7

Collaborations

A theme which was discovered through the answers given by participant 2, 8 and 10 was that the fashion brands they perceive as cool use collaborations in one way or another. Participant 2 recalls a collaboration Levi's had done with Pokémon, which he highlighted not many other brands would do. Participant 8, who perceives Off-White as cool, first acknowledged and got devoted to the brand when it collaborated with the fashion brand Nike for the first time. Participant 10, who also perceives Off-White as a cool fashion brand, acknowledge that they typically collaborate with other fashion brands, emphasizing that their collaborations receive a lot of attention from consumers.

"[…] It's probably more often I see collaborations and stuff like that, that they have launched a new collab with another brand or something...which is advertising in a way […] It's kind of like…because it's a little nicer and a little more expensive, it becomes sort of a hype around their collabs" - participant 10

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Celebrity endorsers	
Ambassador for the brand	"Bruno Mars, partly because he sings about Versace but also because it's kind of the only thing he wears. He has almost become a bit of an ambassador for Versace. He always wears Versace in his music-videos. […] He looks cool in it. I would say that. That's the image he projects, that you look cool in Versace. [...]"- Participant 5
Based on sports legend	"To me, Jordan's is connected to shoes, that they make cool shoes. The brand itself is actually based on the old basketball legend Michael Jordan. […]" - Participant 6
Front figures	"Above all, it is probably price, they are often more expensive due to perhaps front figures and that they are limited […] Off-White and Supreme for example, push it out on celebrities and try to make a name for themselves that way" - Participant 7
Collaborations	
Collaborations with another brand	"[…] It's probably more often I see collaborations and stuff like that, that they have launched a new collab with another brand or something..which is advertising in a way […] It's kind of like..because it's a little nicer and a little more expensive, it becomes sort of a hype around their collabs" - participant 10
Collaborations with a game	"[…] but I remember that pokémon had done a collab with Levi's and came out with their own collection. […] Not many other clothing brands would do so, and it shows a bit that they are unique." - Participant 2
Hooked due to collaboration	"[…] It was when Off-White and Nike made their first collab in 2017, in November I believe. Then I got hooked but I did not dare to buy because they were quite expensive […]" - Participant 8

Table 5: Themes within marketing communication

6.3 Individual Aspects

6.3.1 Self-fulfilment

Through the answers given by the participants, it was discovered that self-fulfilment had an impact on the participants, hence it was added as a factor to individual aspects. The themes of self-fulfilment, characterized as second level codes, are visualized in figure 6 and table 6.

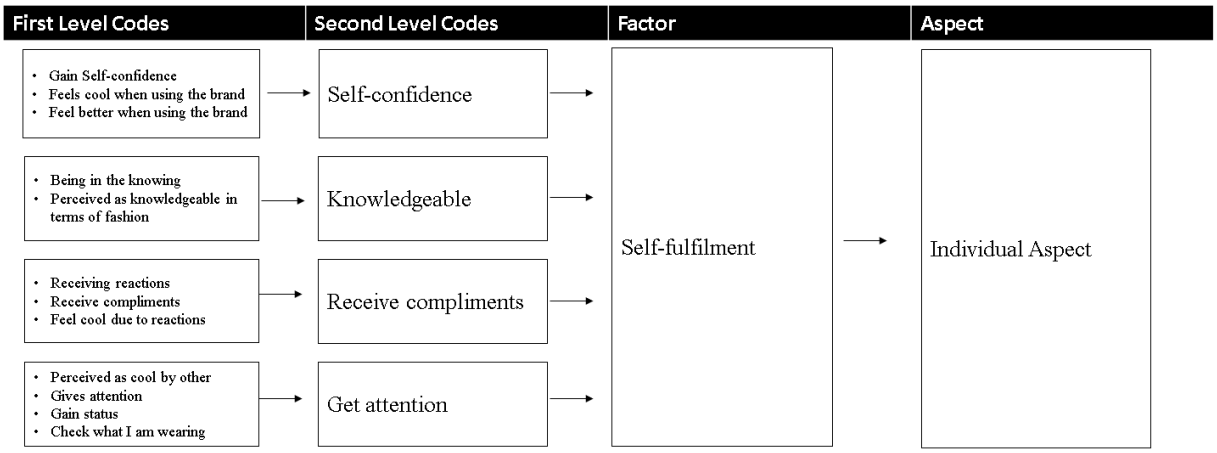

Figure 6: Themes within self-fulfilment

Self-confidence

Participants 7, 8 and 10 gave answers which all centred around the theme self-confidence. Participant 7 highlighted that when he wears a pair of sneakers from the fashion brand Jordans, which he perceives as cool, it makes him feel cool as a result. Participant 8 explained that he gains self-confidence in himself knowing that he owns a sweater from a fashion brand which is also perceived as cool by not just himself, yet others as well. Participant 10 emphasized that he feels more confident and fresher from wearing apparel from Ralph Lauren, which resides from the brand itself.

"Absolutely. You feel fresher, more confident. […] it is not just the garment or its design that does it but the brand itself. But absolutely. I feel better in them, I feel more fresh and more confident." - Participant 10

Knowledgeable

Participant 4 and 6 explained that one is perceived as knowledgeable, by others, by wearing apparel from the brands they perceive as cool. Participant 4 gave an example by comparing a pair of sneakers from Vans to a pair of non-branded sneakers, emphasizing that one is perceived as "being in the knowing" by just wearing a pair of Vans sneakers which is not the case for the non-branded pair. Participant 6, on the other hand, highlighted that one is

perceived as a stereotype by wearing apparel from Patagonia. He explains, that by wearing apparel from Patagonia, you will be perceived as knowledgeable regarding fashion and what is considered hip.

"[…] If you buy Patagonia, you are sort of seen as a stereotype. You are perceived as updated, perhaps in what is in fashion and what is hip when it comes to clothes right now." - Participant 6

Receive Compliments

Another theme which was found was that participant 4, 7 and 9 highlighted that they received compliments by wearing apparel from the brands they perceive as cool. Participant 4 explained that he has a fleece from Patagonia, which he wears with pride and has received positive reactions from, making him feel cool in it. Participant 7, who perceives Jordans as a cool fashion brand, explains that you can receive compliments by just wearing a pair of sneakers from Jordans. Participant 9 described an experience of his when he received compliments from the staff at a clothing store because he wore apparel from Les Deux, which made him feel cool as a result.

"[...] I remember I was in a store with my first Les Deux hoodie…I was returning another garment that did not fit. The staff there were so surprised that I had this brand on me, Les Deux, because it was so new in Sweden. [...] Just that the staff reacted well to the fact that I had Les Deux made me feel a little cool in it." - Participant 9

Get Attention

Other than receiving compliments, receiving attention was also found to be a theme due to the answers given by participants 2, 3, 6 and 8. Participant 2 explains that he perceives Tommy Hilfiger as a fashion brand one wears with the hopes of receiving attention. Participant 3 gives a similar answer, highlighting that one wears apparel from Gucci to receive attention. Participant 8 instead emphasizes that one will attain status by wearing apparel from Off-White. Participant 6 also points out that he not only values his own opinion on the clothes from the brand he perceives as cool, Patagonia, yet other people's opinion on it as well.

[…] The most important thing for me is that I think the clothes are nice or that others feel that they are cool. […] At some level, it is a bit meaningful that people would say "cool t-shirt" or "cool sneakers" sort of. […] - Participant 6

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Self-Confidence	
Gain self-confidence	"[…]But if you wear a sweater from a clothing brand that you know others think is cool, you get better self-confidence from it." - Participant 8
Feels cool when using the brand	"I have some shoes from Jordan. It's like a self-confidence thing. You feel a little cool when you wear them." - Participant 7
Confident in oneself	"[…] Rather than saying that "that is a cool person", it is more that that person feels so confident in himself that he dares to wear a certain style, which is cool." - Participant 6
Feel better by using the brand	"Absolutely. You feel fresher, more confident. […] it is not just the garment or its design that does it but the brand itself. But absolutely. I feel better in them, I feel more fresh and more confident." - Participant 10
Knowledgeable	
Being in the knowing	[...] because if you see someone wearing Vans, then you sort of think like 'Okay, nice'.. like they know what is in style. If someone had the exact same shoes and you had not seen that it was Vans, then it would have been more like 'it is just but it's a pair of cloth shoes'. It being Vans.. you get this image of being in the knowing." - Participant 4
Percieved as knowledgable in terms of fashion	"[…] If you buy Patagonia, you are sort of seen as a stereotype. You are percieved as updated, perhaps in what is in fashion and what is hip when it comes to clothes right now." - Participant 6
Recieve compliments	
Recieving reactions	"Yes, especially with my patagonia fleece, it is also so iconic. I wear it with pride. It has also received some reactions... which makes me feel even cooler wearing it." - Participant 4
Recieve compliments	"[…] You can get compliments if you wear a pair of Jordans, which I have not experienced with any other garment.[…]." - Participant 7
Feel cool due to reactions	"[...] I remember I was in a store with my first Les Deux hoodie..I would return another garment that did not fit. The staff there were so surprised that I had this brand on me, Les Deux, because it was so new in Sweden. [...] Just that the staff reacted well to the fact that I had Les Deux made me feel a little cool in it." - Participant 9
Get attention	
Percieved as cool by other	[…] The most important thing for me is that I think the clothes are nice or that others feel that they are cool. […] At some level, it is a bit meaningful that people would say "cool t-shirt" or "cool sneakers" sort of. […] - Participant 6
Gives attention	"[…] Gucci is also a bit of an attention brand, one wants clothes from Gucci since it gives you attention from people." - Participant 3
Gain status	"[…] and then that it will help you get status, like, that's kind of it." - Participant 8
Check what I am wearing	"Tommy Hilfiger gives a more fashion feel. […] by wearing it sort of becomes something like 'hey, check what I'm wearing here'. […]" - Participant 2

Table 6: Themes within self-fulfilment

6.4 Social Aspects

6.4.1 Reference Groups

Several different themes in the context of reference groups were discovered, this is visualized in figure 7 and table 7. The themes are explained more in-depth below.

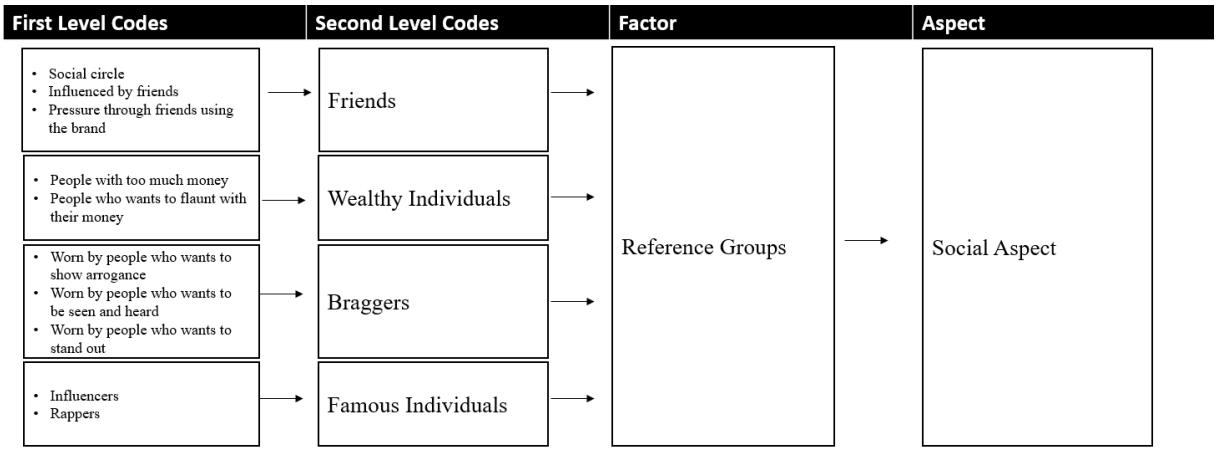

Figure 7: Themes within reference groups

Friends

It became apparent that participant 6, 8 and 9 is influenced by their friends regarding what makes a fashion brand cool. Participant 6 explains that many individuals within his social circle wear apparel from Patagonia and Jordans. Participant 8 highlights that he feels a certain pressure on himself when his friends wear apparel from the fashion brand Moncler, making him want to buy and wear clothes from Moncler as well. Participant 9 emphasize that his friends are the ones which he has taken a lot of knowledge from regarding fashion brands.

"[...] It is not really through advertising but that you have seen people who have had them that you can trust. Because if a friend thinks the fashion brand is nice, cool and that it fits, I trust it. So... it's kind of through my community I learned about certain clothing brands. [...]"
- Participant 9

Wealthy individuals

Participant 5 and 11 explained that the ones who commonly bought apparel from the brands they perceive as cool were wealthy individuals. Participant 5 explains that no ordinary person typically purchase apparel from Versace yet people with a lot of money, since Versace apparel is expensive and stands out. Participant 11 has a similar answer, emphasizing that Hugo Boss is quite an expensive brand and is thereby bought by individuals who want to show that they have money.

"[…] or it is people who want to show that they have money. It is a more expensive brand and then maybe you buy more clothes that have larger logos on them to show it off more. […]" - Participant 11

Braggers

Braggers were also identified as a theme within reference groups, referring to individuals who likes to flaunt or show off their apparel from the brands which were perceived as cool. Participant 3 emphasized that individuals who wear and buy Gucci are individuals who wish to stand out, an answer participant 7 also gave yet with the brand Off-White. Participant 10 highlighted that individuals who purchase apparel from Gucci want to show off an arrogance and carelessness to others as well.

"Those who buy clothes from Gucci, I believe, usually want a more elegant style and you kind of want to show an arrogance. At the same time, you want people to realize that you have high quality clothing on. Sort of like showing a sense of being careless to others. […]" - Participant 10

Famous Individuals

Famous individuals were also found to be a reference group amongst the brands which were perceived as cool. Participant 3 explains that a lot of celebrities and influencers wear clothes from Gucci, which as a result make it more popular and something others want as well. Participant 8 explain that rappers and celebrities are commonly connected to cool fashion brands.

"Celebrities and rappers. It is the rappers who have been at the bottom and could not afford these clothes who then get famous and then they buy a lot of designer clothes and stuff. […] So, it's rappers mainly. They are associated with almost all cool clothing brands." - Participant 8

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Friends	
Influenced by friends	"[...] It is not really through advertising but that you have seen people who have had them that you can trust. Because if a friend thinks the fashion brand is nice, cool and that it fits, I trust it. So.. it's kind of through my community I learned about certain clothing brands. [...]" - Participant 9
Pressure through friends using the brand	"[…] When you see all your friends walking around with Moncler clothes and so on and you're the only one who does not have.. you get an intense pressure to buy it as well, It is obvious." - Participant 8
Social circle	"The similarities are mainly that many in my social circle have clothes from Jordan and Patagonia I would say. […]" - Participant 6
Wealthy Individuals	
People with too much money	"People with too much money […] because it is clothes that really, really stand out. I would not say that it is ordinary consumers like myself who just goes ahead and buy a Versace shirt. […] because it's way too expensive." - Participant 5
People who wants to flaunt with their money	"[…] or it is people who want to show that they have money. It is a more expensive brand and then maybe you buy more clothes that have larger logos on them to show it off more . […]" - Participant 11
Braggers	
Worn by people who wants to show arrogance	"Those who buy clothes from Gucci, I believe, usually want a more elegant style and you kind of want to show an arrogance. At the same time, you want people to realize that you have high quality clothing on. Sort of like showing a sense of being careless to others. […]" - Participant 10
Worn by people who wants to be seen and heard	"[…] they are people with money but who also want to be seen and heard as well .. on social media for example." - Participant 7
Worn by people who wants to stand out	"[…] Gucci are a sort of for people who want to stand out, like if you have an expensive Gucci hat, it's because you want to stand out at a party or so. […]" - Participant 3
Famous Individuals	
Influencers	"[…] Well, there are a lot of celebrities and influencers who have Gucci clothes, which makes it more popular. […] That is sort of how the fashion industry works. If someone well known has it, other people wants it too. […] - Participant 3
Rappers	"Celebrities and rappers. It is the rappers who have been at the bottom and could not afford these clothes who then get famous and then they buy a lot of designer clothes and stuff. […] So it's rappers mainly. They are associated with almost all cool clothing brands." - Participant 8

Table 7: Themes within reference groups

6.4.2 Opinion leaders

Amongst all factors, opinion leaders were the one which received the least answers. One theme was however discovered in the context of opinion leaders, successful men, which is described below. The theme is also visualized in figure 8 and table 8.

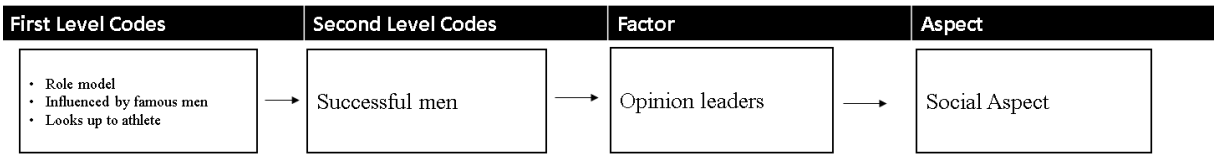

Figure 8: Themes within opinion leaders

Successful men

Participant 7, 10 and 11 mentioned that certain men who could be characterized as successful had an impression on them in terms of the fashion brands they perceive as cool. Participant 7 mentioned that football players were the ones he first and foremost associated with Off-white yet also the founder of the brand, Virgil, who he thinks of as a role model. Participant 10 explained that he associates Gucci with basketball player Lebron James and American football player Dwayne Wade. He points out that Dwayne Wade is someone he looks up to as an individual and that Dwayne has an elegant clothing style which participant 10 himself tries to have. Participant 11 associates the famous men David Beckham and George Clooney with the fashion brand Hugo Boss. Participant 11 emphasizes that due to David Beckhams and George Clooney's usage of Hugo Boss, he appreciates and favours the brand as well.

"[…] David Beckham and George Clooney. I do not know if they have anything to do with Hugo Boss, but I think I saw them in clothes from Hugo Boss […] I think the two guys look good and feel that they are in control of fashion and have a nice style when it comes to clothes. If they use that brand, I think it's nice. [...]" - Participant 11

First Level Codes & Second Level Codes	Representative Quotes
Successful Men	
Role model	"Yes, but there are many football players who use Off-White off the field. Then there is the founder, Virgil, he was a role model after all, I must say." - Participant 7
Influenced by famous men	"[…] David Beckham and George Clooney. I do not know if they have anything to do with Hugo Boss but I think I saw them in clothes from Hugo Boss […] I think the two guys look good and feel that they are in control of fashion and have a nice style when it comes to clothes. If they use that brand, I think it's nice. [...]" - Participant 11
Looks up to athlete	"Yes, not that they use exclusively only Gucci, but some athletes and such as Lebron James and Dwayne Wade above all. […] but Dwayne Wade has more of an elegant style and I look up to him, I would say." - Participant 10

Table 8: Themes within opinion leaders

7. Analysis and discussion

The purpose of this section is to analyse the findings from the research to prior research mentioned in the literature review and theoretical framework. This section will hence go over the factors and the themes which were found within brand aspects, individual aspects and social aspects and relate it to prior research. At the end of this chapter, the adapted theoretical model will be explained and visualised.

7.1 Brand Aspects

7.1.1 Brand Associations

Through the answers given by the participants, two themes which were related to brand associations were found: entertainment and subculture. Entertainment was found by Warren et al. (2019) to be associated with cool brands as well, yet in his research it was specifically concerning extreme sports and activities (Warren et al., 2019). The concept of cool itself is also related to the entertainment scene, since it is argued to have started within the jazz scene in the 1950s (Belk et al., 2010) but also continuing and eventually influencing the youth with coolness through pop-rock artists in the 1960's (Rahman, 2013) and hip-hop artists in the 1990's (Belk et al., 2010; Connor, 1995). The finding is also congruent with Gen-Z perception on entertainment, since they find musicians to be cool (That Marketing Company, n.d.).

Subculture were also identified as a brand association. To begin with, subculture has been found to be associated with perceived cool brands in prior research (Loureiro et al., 2020; Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012) yet it has also been found to be associated with cool as a phenomenon since the 1960's, through countercultural groups (Belk et al., 2010). Subcultures are typically based upon groups of individuals which are different from the mainstream (Warren et al., 2019). Hence, individuals tend to associate themselves with cool, subcultural brands as a way of differentiating themselves from the mainstream (Belk et al., 2010) This could be the scenario here, since prior research has also found that Gen-Z tend to prefer fashion brands which aids them to standout and be different from others (Ceballos and Bejarano, 2018).

7.1.2 Brand Attributes

Several interesting brand attributes emerged from the answers given by the participants in this study: authentic, valuable, uncommon and unique. The attribute of being perceived as authentic as a brand has been found to be correlated with cool brands in previous research (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). Authenticity is argued to be an important characteristic of coolness, since the opposite of authenticity (e.g., mimicry) is argued to have a negative effect

on perceived coolness (Warren & Campbell, 2014). It became clear that participant 8 and 3, who gave answers which formed authenticity as a theme within brand attributes, placed emphasis on the real brand being cool and not copies or perpetuators of the same brand. This is a great example of indexical authenticity, meaning that one seeks to distinguishing the real from the copies (Fritz et al., 2017). This is interesting since prior research has pointed out that consumers tend to become emotionally attached and favour fashion brands through iconic authenticity rather than indexical authenticity (Choi et al., 2015).

Valuable has also been found to be correlated with cool brands in prior research (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro et al., 2020). The attribute valuable is also interesting from what is previously known about Gen-Z consumption of fashion brands, specifically that they are careful about their expenditure in terms of consumption, yet also less driven to purchase high-end fashion brands (Goldring & Azab, 2021). Several participants in this study gave explanations which supported that the fashion apparel brand they perceive as cool were either high-end or expensive. A few participants also pointed out that they were willing to purchase apparel from these brands yet felt restricted to do so due to their personal economy. Prior research has found that consumers tend to be willing to pay more for brands that they perceive as cool (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2018; Jansson & Johansson, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). Since this research did not investigate the effect a cool brand has on Gen-Z men's consumption patterns, the findings in this study cannot answer the question to whether Gen-Z men being different from other groups of individuals in terms being willing to pay more for brands they perceive as cool.

Three participants, participant 1, 8 and 9, emphasized that the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool could be argued to be uncommon. The attribute uncommon has not been found in any prior research regarding cool brands, yet the relation between scarcity and coolness has been discussed before (Bird & Tapp, 2008) and has been argued to not be a characteristic of coolness (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012) or brand coolness (Warren et al., 2019). The participants however explained that they found the fashion apparel brand, which they perceive as cool, to be appropriately popular or rather uncommon. Prior research has found popularity to be a characteristic of cool brands (Warren et al., 2019) yet also that the characteristic can fluctuate depending on whether the brand is argued to be niche cool or mass cool by participants (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro et al., 2020). The relation between niche cool and mass cool brands was not taken into full consideration before the interviews, meaning that the participants in the study were not questioned to elaborate on whether they perceive the cool fashion apparel brand to be niche cool or mass cool. Despite the finding being interesting due to its contradiction with prior

research, it cannot be dwelled on further due to the lack of insights on the participants view on whether they perceive the brands to be niche cool or mass cool.

Another finding amongst brand attributes was that participant 2 and 7 argued the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool, to be unique. Both participants elaborated that the brands were different from other brands and willing to go their own way, a description which aligns with the description Warren and Campbell (2014) give for the characteristic autonomous, which is a common feature which tends to drive an object (e.g., brand) to be perceived as cool. Uniqueness has also been found to drive a brand to be perceived as cool in prior research (Warren et al., 2019, Loureiro & Lopes, 2012) and has been found to be a factor which drives an object or an individual to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z consumers specifically (That Marketing Company, n.d.).

7.1.3 Product characteristics

Several findings were made amongst the factor product characteristics, specifically the characteristics: quality, functionality, unique, low-key, express personality and aesthetically pleasing. Quality was a product characteristic almost every participant highlighted in terms of the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool. Quality has been found in previous research to drive a product to be perceived as cool (Runyan et al., 2014). High-quality products have also been found to drive brands to be perceived as cool (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). The finding aligns with what is previously known about Gen-Z consumption patterns as well, specifically that they aim for high quality apparel as a result of careful expenditure (Goldring & Azab, 2021).

Functionality was highlighted by participant 9 and 11, both participants emphasizing that the apparel from the fashion brands they perceive as cool has great fit and are comfortable. Like quality, functionality is also a characteristic which has been found to drive products to be perceived as cool (Runyan et al., 2014). Products with high functionality are also found to drive brands to be perceived as cool (Warren et al., 2019). Functional apparel is also, typically, favoured within the fashion consumption by Gen-Z consumers (Goldring & Azab, 2021) as well as male consumers (Koksal, 2014).

Unique was mentioned as a product characteristic by participant 5, 7 and 10, highlighting that the apparel from the fashion brands they perceive as cool are unique or different from other fashion brands apparel. Runyan et al. (2014) found that uniqueness as a characteristic tend to

drive a product to be perceived as cool, and a cool product tend to drive the brand behind it to be perceived as cool as well (Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012).

Participant 1, 3, 4 and 11 elaborated on the apparel from the fashion brands they perceive as cool, emphasising that the apparel was low-key in its appearance by being simple or not standing out visually. Low-key apparel or apparel which does not stand out has not been mentioned as a factor which drives either a product or a brand to be cool in past research (Runyan et al., 2014; Warren et al., 2019; Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). Nancarrow et al. (2002) has however highlighted that cool fashion apparel is commonly characterised as understated and authentic, possibly aligning with the finding in this research.

Participant 6 and 10 elaborated on the idea that they were able to express their own personality through the apparel from the fashion brands they perceive as cool. Being able to express oneself through a product (e.g., apparel) have been found in prior research to drive a product to be perceived as cool (Runyan et al., 2014; Sundar et al., 2014) and cool products have the possibility to drive a brand to be perceived as cool as well (Warren et al., 2019). Being able to express oneself through one's apparel has also been seen to be typically valued by male consumers (Ayman & Kaya, 2014; Koksal, 2014) and by Gen-Z consumers (Goldring & Azab, 2021; Joshi & Garg., 2021).

Aesthetically pleasing was also a finding within product characteristics, a finding which were derived from the answers given by participant 4, 6, 8 and 11. Aesthetically pleasing is a characteristic which has been found to drive a product to be perceived as cool (Runyan et al., 2014). Warren et al. (2019) also found that aesthetically pleasing products tends to drive a brand to be perceived as cool as well. The finding hence aligns well with previous research within this field.

7.1.4 Marketing communication

Two types of marketing communication were found through the answers given by the participants in this study: celebrity endorsement and collaborations. To begin with, both findings align with the research conducted by Djafarova and Tamar (2021) who found that Gen-Z consumers favour and appreciate marketing communication which is more creative in comparison to just advertising in the context of apparel brands. Participants 5, 6 and 7 gave responses which supported that the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool had some sort of celebrity endorsement behind them. As mentioned earlier, celebrity endorsements have been

found to drive brands to be perceived as cool (Warren et al., 2018) and celebrity endorsements tend to influence Gen-Z consumers consumption practices (Gentina et al., 2016).

Participants 2, 8 and 10 gave answers which resulted in an interesting finding in terms of marketing communication: collaborations. The idea that collaborations between brands or/and companies can drive a brand to be perceived as cool has not been mentioned in any past research. Though recent research by Suzuki and Kanno (2022), with focus on co-branding between luxury fashion brands and popular fashion brands, found that there was a better perceived fit between a luxury fashion brand and popular fashion brand if the popular fashion brand was perceived as cool. The idea that an individual, which is perceived as cool, can impact an object (e.g., brand) to be perceived as cool as well has been supported by prior research (Warren et al., 2018; Belk et al., 2010; Gurrieri, 2009; Nancarrow et al., 2002), less is however known regarding a perceived cool brand's effect on another brand. This could possibly be a future research topic to explore further.

7.2 Individual Aspects

The factor brand-self congruity was removed from the adjusted framework, as a result of no findings or answers from the participants supporting the factor. Instead, as a result of the findings, another factor took its place, self-fulfilment.

7.2.1 Self-fulfilment

The factor self-fulfilment is a factor which is built upon 4 features; Self-confidence, knowledgeable, receive compliments and get attention. Participants 7, 8 and 10 gave answers which resulted with the finding self-confidence, meaning that they, through the usage of the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool, feel more self-confident. Past research has shown a positive relationship between coolness and self-confidence (Dar-Nimrod, Ganesan & MacCann, 2018) and research on Gen-Z consumption patterns shows that their drive to purchase fashion apparel is driven by their need of self-fulfilment and to feel more self-confident (Joshi & Garg, 2021).

Participants 4 and 6 gave responses which supported the finding knowledgeable, meaning that the perceive themselves as more knowledgeable in terms of fashion and consumption by consuming the fashion apparel brands, they perceive as cool. Nancarrow & Nancarrow (2007) suggests that "cool is now best described as an advanced form of knowledge about commodities

and consumption practices", a quote which fits well with this finding. The finding also aligns with what McNeill and McKay (2016) found regarding young men's consumption patterns in fashion, finding that men typically purchase apparel from what they already know is fashionable.

Receive compliments was a feature which was derived from the replies given by participants 4, 7 and 9, meaning that through their usage of the fashion brands, they perceive as cool, they receive compliments and feel better about themselves as result. Prior research has found that Gen-Z females tend to find objects (e.g., brands) cool as a result of how the objects make them feel (That Marketing Company, n.d.). Despite all participants being Gen-Z men in this study, this could potentially be the matter here as well despite gender.

Get attention was also found as a feature of self-fulfilment, through the responses given by participant 2, 3, 6 and 8. Their answers emphasised that the usage of the fashion brands, they perceive as cool, they either get the feel of a higher status or that more attention is placed upon them. This finding aligns with what Ceballos and Bejarano (2018) found regarding the fashion consumption of Gen-Z, referring to Gen-Z tendency to purchase fashion with an attempt to gain status from their peers and social surroundings. Similar findings have also been found in men's fashion consumption, as their consumption of apparel is driven by their need of possessing status and be able to showcase it as well (Rinallo, 2007).

7.3 Social Aspects

7.3.1 Reference Groups

Four types of reference groups were derived from the answers given by the participants: friends, wealthy individuals, braggers and famous individuals. Participants 6,8 and 9 gave explanations which resulted with the finding friends as a reference group. Their reasonings for this were different yet surrounded the idea of complying with the opinions of their friends regarding the fashion brands they perceive as cool, showing signs of utilitarian influence (see chapter 3.3.1) (Fernandes & Panda, 2019). This finding is congruent with what is already known about Gen-Z, first and foremost that they are influenced by their friends regarding what is fashionable (Gentina et al., 2016) yet also that Gen-Z men tend to rely on their friends regarding what is cool (That Marketing Company, n.d.). Men in general has also been found to be influenced by their social surroundings regarding their fashion consumption (Ayman & Kaya, 2014) and that

friends and peers in general has impact on consumers perception on what is cool or not (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al., 2018; Runyan et al., 2014; Donnell & Wardlow, 2000).

Participants 5 and 11 gave answers which resulted with the finding wealthy individuals as a reference group, meaning that they associated individuals who could be argued to be wealthy with the fashion apparel brands they perceived as cool. Warren et al. (2019) found that there is a tendency for brands which are argued to be high status (e.g., upper class, exclusive) to be perceived as cool by consumers. This could possibly be the case here as well, since the participant 5 and 11 argued that the fashion brands they perceive as cool could only be afforded by wealthy individuals in the first place. There is also a positive relationship between luxury values and brand coolness, meaning that values related to luxury (e.g., wealth) influence brand coolness positively (Loureiro et al., 2020). Hence, this finding is also supported by prior research.

Braggers as a reference group was derived from the replies given by participant 3, 7 and 10, meaning that they find individuals who seeks validation and attention from other individuals to be associated with the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool. Bragger has not been identified as a factor of coolness or brand coolness in prior research. However, past research has found that consumers consume certain products from certain brands to attain social status and inclusion from one's surroundings (Hammerl et al., 2016) and since coolness enables group affiliation (Runyan et al., 2014) it aligns with this finding.

Famous individuals were also a finding in the context of reference groups. Participants 3 and 8 gave different examples upon how famous individuals were associated with the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool. Participant 3 mentioned that social media influencers wore apparel from, or were associated, with the fashion brand he perceived as cool. This finding relates to the findings of Munsch (2021) who found that social media influencers had a great influence on Gen-Z consumption patterns, an impact greater than marketing efforts (e.g., advertisements) from brands for example (Munsch, 2021). Participant 8 on the other hand associated rappers with the fashion brands he perceives as cool. This is interesting since rappers and the hip-hop culture are argued to be the latest exemplification of coolness (Belk, et al., 2010). Rappers have also been associated with rebellious traits (Connor, 1995) which is typically associated with coolness in the context of individuals and objects (e.g., brands) (Warren & Campbell, 2014).

7.3.2 Opinion leaders

Through the responses given by the participants, one type of opinion leader could be identified: successful men. This finding is derived from the answers given by participant 7, 10 and 11. Participant 7 explained that he looked up to the founder of the fashion brand he perceives as cool, calling the founder a role model. This aligns with the findings from the research conducted by Casalo et al. (2020) who found that opinion leaders are commonly perceived as role models by consumers. Participant 10 and 11, on the other hand, associated specific sports celebrities with the fashion apparel brands they perceive as cool. Participant 10 and 11 placed emphases on the sports celebrities being in the knowing in terms of fashion and looking up to them as individuals. The sports celebrities, in this scenario, seems to influence participant 10 and 11 regarding what is cool and fashionable, an element Nancarrow et al. (2002) has claimed to be one of opinion leader's strength in the context of coolness. The explanations given by participants 10 and 11 also showcase that the sports celebrities possess great taste and expertise regarding what is fashionable, which are typical characteristics often possessed by opinion leaders (Fill & Turnbull, 2019; Casalo et al., 2020). Sports celebrities has also been found in previous research to influence brands to be perceived as cool by consumers (Warren et al., 2018).

7.4 The adjusted theoretical model

Through the answers given by the participants, almost all themes which were identified could be matched with the factors which were presented in the theoretical framework. As a result of the findings a new factor was added to individual aspects, self-fulfilment, which is a great finding. Value has, for the most part, been placed upon the brand in terms of perceived cool brands, yet this show that the participants also gain something (i.e., higher self-confidence, receiving compliments) from the perceived cool brands. There were no responses given by the participants which could be identified with brand-self congruity; hence it was removed as a factor from the adjusted theoretical model.

The factors within brand aspects also went through a small change. In the original theoretical model, celebrity endorsement was stated as its own factor due to prior theories and literature. As a result of the findings, the celebrity endorsement factor transitioned into marketing communication. It is important to acknowledge that marketing communication was not regarded as a factor in the theoretical model before the actual interview process and thematic

analysis process. This is because marketing communication itself has not been regarded as a driver of cool in brands. Celebrity endorsement has been found to drive a brand to be perceived as cool (Warren et al., 2018), which is a specific type of marketing communication (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2018). Despite other marketing communication techniques has been used to establish a cool image as a brand, like anti-advertising (Belk et al., 2010; Frank, 1997), no research has supported that anti-advertising has driven a brand to be perceived as cool by its consumers. As a result of the findings, however, the factor changed from celebrity endorsement to marketing communication to visualize the findings in a coherent and understandable manner.

The adjusted theoretical model, for factors which drive a fashion apparel brand to be cool, is visualized in figure 9.

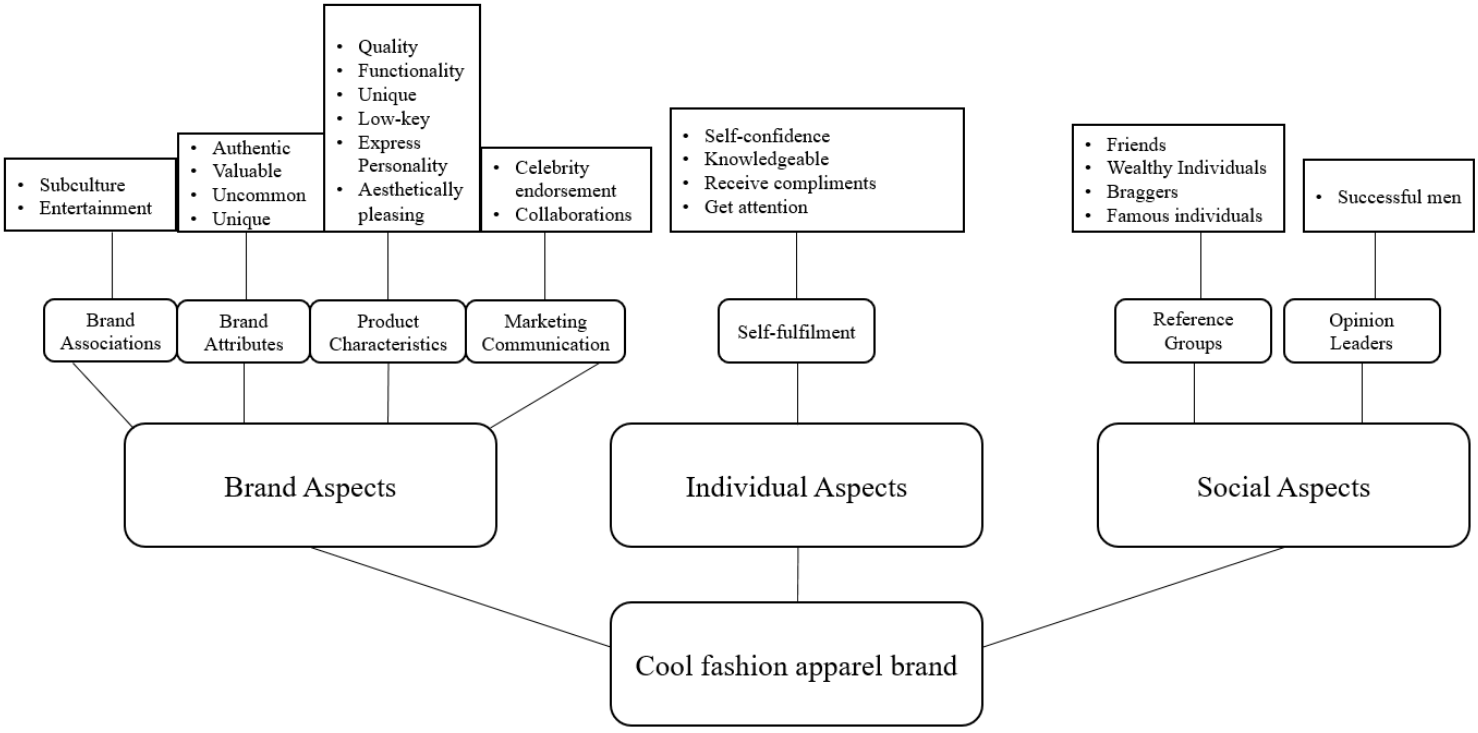

Figure 9: The adjusted theoretical model

8. Conclusions

This chapter goes over the conclusions and implications derived from this research. Limitations and possible future research within this field are also mentioned in this chapter.

8.1 The research questions

The purpose of this research is to explore what factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z men, and how these factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool by Gen-Z men. Through the purpose, two research questions could be derived. First research question is: *What factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool?*

To answer the first question, one must first be aware that the factors are separated into three major sections: brand aspects, individual aspects and social aspects. The findings in this research showcase that there are four factors which are represented by brand aspects, one factor is represented by individual aspects and two factors are represented by social aspects. The factors, within their specific sections, are visualized below in table 9 and are, collectively, the answer to the first research question.

Aspects	**Factors**
Brand Aspects	Brand associations; Brand attributes; Product characteristics; Marketing communication
Individual Aspects	Self-fulfilment
Social Aspects	Reference groups; Opinion leaders

Table 9: Aspects with representing factors

The second research question in this research is: *How do the factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool?*

The second question is answered by dwelling deeper into the factors above. In this research, it was shown that the factors had multiple ways to drive a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool. To make it understandable and consistent, table 10 visualizes the different themes found within each factor. The themes are, collectively, how the factors drive fashion apparel brands to be perceived as cool and hence the answer to the second research question. For a better understanding of the themes and the meaning behind them, see the findings chapter (chapter 6).

Factors	**Themes**
Brand Associations	Entertainment; Subculture
Brand Attributes	Authentic; Valuable; Uncommon; Unique
Product Characteristics	Quality; Functionality; Unique; Low-key; Express personality; Aesthetically pleasing
Marketing Communication	Celebrity endorsement; Collaborations
Self-fulfilment	Self-confidence; Knowledgeable; Recieve compliments; Get attention
Reference Groups	Friends; Wealthy individuals; Braggers; Famous individuals
Opinion leaders	Successful men

Table 10: Factors with representing themes

8.2 Theoretical implications

To begin with, this research has given a theoretical model adapted after Gen-Z men in relation to perceived cool fashion apparel brands, which has not been done before. This enables the possibility to test the theory with a bigger sample in quantitative matters, potentially identifying if some factors influence a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool more than other factors. Furthermore, there is now theory on Gen-Z men in connection to fashion brands. The theory is limited to a small sample of Gen-Z men with similar, cultural backgrounds, but it gives insights on what Gen-Z men place value upon in terms of fashion brands, theory which did not exist prior to this research. There is also now more theory on cool brands in relation to fashion apparel as well as factors and themes which drive a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool, which prior research has emphasized the need for (Warren et al., 2019).

It was interesting to find that most of the factors were the same in the theoretical model as in the adapted theoretical model. By excluding marketing communication in the adapted theoretical model, which to a certain degree is the same factor as in the theoretical model yet with more depth, brand-self congruity is the only factor which is different between the theoretical model and the adapted theoretical model. Since there was no significant evidence for brand-self congruity, the factor was removed. However, despite being no evidence for the factor, there is also a possibility that there was a lack of appropriate questioning for this factor. Brand-self congruity concerns symbolic and abstract concepts in relation to one's consumption and self-concept (Sirgy, 2018), which can be difficult to comprehend since it requires an individual (i.e., participant) to critically examine their own consumption in relation to their own self-concept. Hence, I would suggest for future research within perceived cool brands to examine brand-self congruity through other qualitative techniques than just questioning, for example incorporate metaphor elicitation techniques. Otherwise, most of the theoretical model being the same after being adapted as a result of the findings, indicating that product category in relation to brand coolness may only have a slight impact on the factors.

8.3 Managerial implications

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, the findings shall not be perceived, or argued, to be generalizable across all Gen-Z men. On the other hand, the findings do give a great insight on a small sample of Swedish Gen-Z men's perception of fashion brands and what they place value upon, which could be argued to be valuable for apparel brands within Sweden. This research gives several factors, and its representing themes, that are possessed by fashion apparel brands which were perceived as cool by the participants. The managerial implications are

therefore that fashion apparel brands, who wish to attain the perceived image of cool from its consumers, to place emphasize on the factors found in this study as it leverages the possibility to be perceived as cool. This research does not provide enough evidence for the factors to drive a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool by every consumer. However, it does give possible insights of what might drive a fashion brand to be perceived as cool, which is a great characteristic to have as a brand/company (see chapter 2.9).

8.4 Ethical and societal implications

One implication from this study is that all factors found to be related to brand aspects were positive qualities which drive the fashion brands to be perceived as cool (see chapter 6.2). This gives brands within the fashion industry, who wish to be perceived as cool, an incentive to focus on sustainable production practices, good working conditions and ethical business practices. Since these types of practices tend to be associated with good qualities for a fashion brand (e.g., high-quality products) (Muthu, 2019) and positively affect society and the environment simultaneously (The global Goals, n.d.). Unsustainable production and unethical working conditions within the fashion industry is a common issue, which tends to result with bad qualities, such as products with low-quality (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012; Muthu, 2019), which have no evidence of driving a brand to be perceived as cool by consumers. High-quality products, on the other hand, was found to be a driver of coolness in this research, as well as in prior research (Warren et al., 2019; Runyan et al., 2014: Loureiro & Lopes, 2012). Social awareness alone has also been found to drive brands to be perceived as cool by consumers (Loureiro & Lopes, 2012), justifying correct and ethical practices from brands who wish to be perceived as cool even further.

8.5 Limitations

One limitation with the research is that it has been conducted by one researcher. The intention has been to objectively derive the findings from the raw data in this research, yet there is still a possibility that the findings would have been presented differently if more researchers were involved in the abductive thematic analysis process. It is also important to highlight that despite conducting the research with objectivity in mind, interviewer errors are still a possibility which inevitably may have affected the findings. Another limitation was the qualitative technique. Coolness is argued to be an abstract concept (Warren & Campbell, 2014; Belk et al., 2010), hence some participants in the study did have a hard time presenting their own thoughts and beliefs upon questioning. The qualitative approach which was chosen for this research did give insightful findings, yet another qualitative technique which puts less stress on the participants

capability to think about their own consumption in abstract terms could possibly have given different findings. One suggestion is for future studies, within this specific field of research, to incorporate metaphor elicitation techniques, due to its possibility to ease the interview process (I.e., questioning) for participants when the research topic is perceived as abstract (Nunan et al., 2020). Another limitation is the amount of prior research on Gen-Z men. There is a substantial amount of research on Gen-Z in relation to consumption practices, yet less on Gen-Z men consumption practices specifically. As a result, there has not been a possibility to analyse the findings in this research to prior research on Gen-Z men. Hence, future research on Gen-Z men and their consumption practices is needed within the field of research. Another limitation is that this has been done on a sample of Swedish Gen-Z men, which is a small segment of consumers who potentially have different outlooks on fashion consumption than Gen-Z men from other cultures. Culture is argued to influence what one perceives as cool (Bruun et al., 2016), this choice of sample will hence inevitably influence the findings, which one shall be aware about.

8.6 Future research

This research enables for the possibility to do a quantitative study on cool fashion apparel brands by relying on the specific factors, and its themes, which has been found in this study. Such type of study can possibly identify if a certain factor, or factors, have a greater tendency to drive a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool more than others. One possibility is also to do a similar qualitative study on Gen-Z women within the context of cool fashion apparel brands, to see if there are any similarities or differences in comparison to the findings in this research. Another interesting future research topic is to do a qualitative study on factors which tends to drive a brand to be perceived as cool within another product category, to possibly identify if there are any similarities/differences in terms of factors across different markets/product categories. As mentioned in limitations, this research has been conducted on Swedish Gen-Z men, I therefore suggest future research to be conducted on Gen-Z men within other countries or cultures as well. It would also be interesting to see a cross-cultural study on Gen-Z men in the context of cool brands, to see whether the factors driving a brand to be perceived as cool change depending on culture/location of the participants. As mentioned earlier, future research could investigate brand-self congruity and perceived cool brands further, to see if there is a relationship there. The effect cool brands have on other brands through collaborations is also a possible future study.

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10. Appendix

10.1 Confirmation of participation (English)

Hi!

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for your voluntary participation in my research for a Degree of Master of Science in Business and Economics, it means a lot to me.

The purpose of my research is to explore why Gen-Z men perceive certain fashion apparel brands as cool, hence gain an understanding of what it is that drives a fashion apparel brand to be perceived as cool. The interview will therefore focus upon fashion consumption, brand aspects, individual aspects and social aspects. The research will contribute new and valuable theory about the importance a brand may have in the context of fashion. Your participation will be anonymous, only having your age and gender as personal information. Information that thus emerges during the interview will not be able to be linked to you in any way. The interview will be recorded to later be transcribed. Data which emerges during the interview will be protected and processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and terminated when the research is completed. You have the right to cancel your participation in the research at any time, hence also have all data connected to you terminated immediately.

The interview will have its focus on fashion apparel brands in relation to coolness. Hence, I wish for you as a participant to bring the name of one or several fashion apparels brands you personally perceive as cool to the interview.

Martin Rosén

Date: _____ Signature: _____

10.2 Confirmation for participation (Swedish)

Hej!

Först och främst vill jag bara tacka för din frivilliga medverkan i min undersökning för att nå en civilekonomexamen, det betyder otroligt mycket.

Syftet med min studie är att utforska varför män som tillhör generation-z upplever vissa klädmärken som coola, därmed bilda en uppfattning om vad det är som gör att ett klädmärke anses som coolt. Intervjun kommer därför beröra klädmärken i relation till mode, varumärkesaspekter, individuella aspekter och sociala aspekter. Undersökningen kommer bidra med ny och värdefull teori gällande ett varumärkes betydelse bland generation-z män i kontexten av mode.

Din medverkan i studien kommer vara fullständigt anonym och kommer endast använda din ålder och kön som personlig information. Information som därmed framkommer under intervjun kommer inte kunna kopplas till dig på något sätt. Intervjun kommer spelas in, därav endast ljud, för att sedan transkriberas. Data som framkommer under intervjun kommer att skyddas och behandlas enligt dataskyddsdirektiv (GDPR) och raderas när studien är färdigställd. Du har all rätt att avbryta din medverkan när som helst under eller efter intervjun, om så önskas, därmed också få din insamlade data raderad.

Intervjun kommer som sagt beröra klädmärken i relation till coolt. För att underlätta intervjun önskar jag att du tar med dig namnet på ett eller fler klädmärken som du personligen anser är coola till intervjun.

Martin Rosén

Datum: _____ Signatur: _____

10.3 Interview guide (Swedish)

Fashion Consumption

Hur ofta köper du modekläder?

Vart köper du modekläder?

Vilka faktorer spelar roll för dig när du handlar modekläder?

Skulle du säga att mode är viktigt för dig?

Har klädmärket en stor betydelse för dig när det kommer till kläder?

Finns det några klädmärken du ofta köper kläder av

- Vilka är dessa märken?
- Anser du att dessa klädmärken som coola?

Finns det något eller några klädmärken du anser är coola, men som du själv inte köper kläder av?

- Vilka är dessa klädmärken?
- Varför köper du inte kläder från dem?

Ranking Task

Om vi rankar dem här varumärkena, finns det ett varumärke du anser är mer coolt än de andra?

- Om ja, hur kommer det sig att Brand X är mer coolt än de andra?

Brand Aspects

Om du fick beskriva Brand X med tre ord, vilka tre ord skulle det vara?

- Varför just dem tre orden?

Hur skulle du beskriva brand X för någon som inte hört talats om det innan, exempelvis för en kompis.

Associerar du brand X med något specifikt?

Hur skulle du beskriva kläderna som brand x producerar?

- Anser du att kläderna är coola? Om ja, på vilket sätt är kläderna coola för dig?

Hur skulle du beskriva loggan hos Brand X?

- Vilken betydelse har den för Brand X?

Lägger du märke till reklam av Brand X?

Om ja – Vilken typ av bild har du fått av den?

Finns det en särskild kändis du associerar med Brand X

- Hur är din bild av denna kändis?
- Ser du denna kändis som cool? Varför/Varför inte?

Social Aspects

Berätta för mig vilka individer det är som köper kläder från Brand X.

Köper dina vänner kläder från Brand X?

Använder någon, eller några, du ser upp till brand X?

Associerar du brand x med en specifik grupp av individer?

- Om ja, vilken bild ger denna grupp dig?

Comparing Task

En tidigare deltagare i studien ansåg att brand X är coolt.

- Anser du att det varumärket är coolt? Varför/varför inte?

Eller

Om vi jämför Brand X med ett annat coolt klädmärke, exempelvis Brand Y.

Finns det några likheter mellan dem?

Finns det några skillnader mellan dem?

Individual Aspects

Är det viktigt för dig att ett klädmärke anses som coolt?

Känner du dig cool när du använder kläder från brand X?

- På vilket sätt?

Försöker du porträttera en viss bild av dig själv genom att använda kläder från Brand X?

- Vilken typ av bild?

10.4 Interview guide (English)

Fashion consumption

How often do you purchase fashion apparel?

Where do you purchase fashion apparel?

What factors are important for you when you purchase fashion apparel?

Would you say that fashion is important for you?

Does the brand have a great importance when it comes to fashion?

Are there any brands you frequently purchase fashion from?

- Which are these brands?
- Do you perceive these brands as cool?

Is there any fashion brand you perceive as cool yet do not purchase apparel from?

- Which are these brands?
- Why do you not purchase apparel from them?

Ranking task

If you would rank the fashion brands you perceive as cool, is there one brand you would argue is cooler than the other brands?

- If yes, how come brand *X* is cooler than the other brands?

Brand Aspects

If you were to describe brand X with three word, which three words would you choose?

- How come you choose those three words?

How would you describe brand X for someone who have not heard about it before, for example a friend?

Do you associate brand X with anything?

How would you describe the apparel which brand X produces?

- Would you argue that the clothes that brand X produces are cool? How come?

How would you describe the logo of brand X?

- What importance does the logo have for brand X?

Do you acknowledge any advertisement from brand X?

If yes:

- what perception of the brand has the advertisement given you?

Is there any celebrity you associate with brand x?

If yes:

- What is your perception of this celebrity?
- Do you perceive this celebrity as cool? Why/Why not?

Social Aspects

Tell me about the individuals who purchase apparel from brand X.

Do your friends purchase apparel from brand X?

Does anyone, which you look up to, purchase/use apparel from brand X?

Do you associate brand X with a specific group of individuals?

If yes:

- What image does this group give you?

Comparing Task

Another participant in the study perceived brand X as cool.

- Do you perceive brand X as cool? Why/Why not?

Or

If we compare brand X with another brand you perceive as cool, for example brand Y.

- Are there any similarities between them?
- Are there any differences between them?

Individual Aspects

Is it important for you that a fashion brand you use is perceived as cool?

Do you feel cool when using apparel from brand X?

- In what way?

Are you trying to portray a certain image of yourself by wearing apparel from brand X?

- What type of image?